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The Editors
LIBERTY'S LIGHT

Neville Braybrooke
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$1.50

JULY 11, 1986

St. Charles Seminary Library
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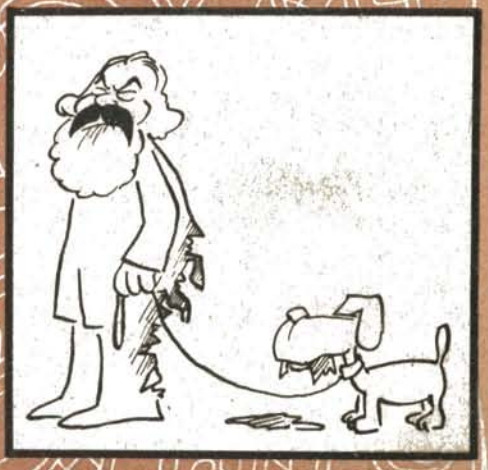
MEXICO: THE NEXT EARTHQUAKE

Curtis Skinner
The Editors



MARXIST THEOLOGY?
John C. Cort

INSIDE THE SYNOD
Joseph A. Komonchak

'THE N WORD'

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Correspondence

THE BATTLE FOR NICARAGUA

READERS RESPOND

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: Yes, as your editorial ["In Messiness, Veritas," May 9] says, political engagement requires of Christians "a willingness to seek . . . the truth, the whole truth." But, as you didn't say, engagement also requires a balancing act, an effort to point up those elements of a messy and clouded situation, like the one in Nicaragua, that are most relevant to policymaking. And, finally, it requires taking a stand.

In these respects, I think the editorial fails. Even if all its factual allegations are accurate, the emphasis is wrong. You acknowledge Mr. Reagan's ideologically-derived "nonchalance" about facts, but the weight of criticism falls on those "religious activists" who, in their ideological innocence, give allegedly uncritical support to the Sandinista regime. But Ronald Reagan is our *president*. Whether he's a conscious liar or only a too-confident ideologue, his false statements about Nicaragua shape the policy of his administration and have far greater effect in Congress than all the testimonies and rebuttals offered by all those activists whose purported naiveté you find so disturbing.

Secondly, the final political question is a practical one — not "What is truth?" but "What is to be done?" On that score, at least to this reader, the editorial waffles. Your penultimate paragraph makes a reference to some Americans who oppose support of the *contras* as cruel and foolish, or who believe that legitimate U.S. interests can be better served by diplomacy than by proxy warfare. Having mentioned those views, without endorsing them and without mentioning that these are the policies recommended by the naive religious activists, you return to the main theme of the lecture, which is directed against the perceptual blindness and rhetorical excesses of the do-gooders.

What about the actions and policies of the do-badders? Perhaps you mean to say that, once the "full and disturbing messiness" of the Nicaraguan reality is adequately grasped and precisely analyzed, Reagan is right. Or that political unrealism on the religious left is more offensive than militarized fanaticism on the ideological right. Or possibly, in some other editorial that I missed, you've ranked these political sins differently, so that in this instance there was no need to seek and engage the truth, the whole truth. I hope so.

ROBERT G. HOYT

Writer oversight

Ossining, N.Y.

To the Editors: Your editorial, "In Messiness, Veritas" [May 9], may have served its readers better by pointing out deficiencies in Edward Sheehan's analysis, rather than condescendingly urging readers to seek "the whole truth." Sheehan does make a convincing argument for many, including myself, who have been underestimating Sandinista authoritarianism, but his attempt to portray Cardinal Obando y Bravo as a possibly misunderstood hero left holes in the canvas.

Sheehan cites the public Mass in Miami attended by *contra* leaders as supplying "at least a grain of truth that (Obando) sympathizes with the *contras* and hopes for their eventual victory." The writer overlooks, however, that at the height of the recent aid-to-the-*contras* debate in the U.S. Congress, the cardinal appeared at the United Nations to condemn the "persecution" of the church in Nicaragua. Sheehan also neglected to note that Obando, while fearlessly condemning Sandinista excesses, has never condemned *contra* atrocities except to bemoan killing "on both sides." Nor, to my knowledge, has the cardinal ever protested the U.S. role in his beleaguered country, not even the mining of its harbors nor the printing of the manual promoting terrorism within his country. He has also appealed for financial support for the church's apostolic efforts from U.S. industrialists known to be active promoters of the *contra* cause, and accepted an award from an organization whose leaders lobby for support of U.S. policy on the *contras*. He, of course, has every right to act this way, but he should not be befuddled if people see him as a *contra* sympathizer, and Sheehan should concede more than a grain of truth.

FRANK MAUROVICH

Snapshot analysis

Ithaca, N.Y.

To the Editors: I am surprised that you not only published Edward Sheehan's article ["The Battle for Nicaragua," May 9], but also endorsed it so strongly in your accompanying editorial. In your invitation to find the truth of the Nicaraguan situation in its "messiness," you also lent support to an extremely limited and outdated view of the Catholic church's mission in Central America.

I am not prepared to enter into debate with Mr. Sheehan on the relative merits of the "traditional" and "people's" churches of Nicaragua. Unlike him I have never been to that country and, in fact, I read with great interest his informative interviews with leaders of the two factions. However, one does not need to visit Nicaragua to take issue with some of the underlying views expressed

(Continued on page 412)

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TROUBLE NEXT DOOR

AT FIRST GLANCE, Mexico's teetering on the verge of bankruptcy in 1986 looks like a summer rerun of its 1982 default. It isn't. In four years significant changes have taken place. Not only has the total Mexican deficit grown, from $80 billion to $97 billion, but the *political* debt — accrued during the austerity programs imposed after the 1982 bailout — has come due.

While the 1982 crisis was brought on by overexpansion, financed by profligate borrowing during the oil boom in the late 1970s, the current crisis — set off by a slump in oil prices — cannot be blamed solely on government mismanagement. Global interdependence is a factor here that defies simple solutions: consider how Saudi Arabia and the rest of OPEC's overproduction of oil is adversely affecting Mexico as another oil producer, but how welcome the price drop is for heavy oil consumers like the U.S. and the Western economy in general.

But global considerations aside, reflection on Mexico as a nation reveals the obvious: its financial problems are of a piece with its social problems. Mexico's stagnant GNP, trade imbalance, high rate of inflation, flight of billions of dollars of capital (mostly to U.S. banks), cost of reconstruction after the recent earthquakes, and now a staggering blow to its major export, oil, must be seen in the context of a steadily growing population dependent on ever skimpier resources and a growing political disaffection spanning all classes. Altogether, this is what jeopardizes the stability of the nation sharing a 2,000 mile border with the U.S., a border uniquely peaceful by Latin American standards.

That is why the "low-key" reaction of U.S. lenders reported in *Business Week* (June 23) seems myopic. The bankers are cool because the amount of loan exposure to Mexico in the ten largest U.S. banks is much less than it was during the 1982 default: 48 percent of lending capital then, compared with 21 percent today. Yet, even a doubling of the price of oil could not correct all that ails Mexico. And it is the deterioration of the *nation* which will affect U.S. bankers — not to mention all the rest of us — more than even a total loan writeoff.

If there is any rerun to be seen, it is this: while experts agree that no short-term solution will do and that only long-term economic growth has a chance of forestalling another, possibly worse, crisis down the road, the media are full of glowing short-term rescue deals and lean on proposals for the long haul. This, we've seen before.

Since 1982 the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and commercial lenders have confronted Mexico with proposals for domestic cutbacks which strangled any capacity for economic growth even before the oil price slump. After taking the unpopular steps of complying with the multilateral financial agencies, President Miguel De la Madrid must be wondering just how Mexico fell from its dubious distinction as "model debtor" to be regarded as "ne'er do well

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neighbor.'' Expecially considering that U.S. lenders have gained the most from Mexico's plight: from the interest paid to date on Mexico's deficit to investment of flight capital and even deposits from the illegal drug trade. (De la Madrid himself is not doing poorly either. According to accounts in the *New Republic* and the *New York Times*, based on a U.S. intelligence report, the president deposited $162 million in a Swiss bank account in 1983 alone.)

De la Madrid's hints at a unilateral moratorium on interest payments or the necessity of linking repayment rates to Mexico's export earnings have met with stern dismissals from American bankers, lest other Latin American debtors grow enamored of the notion. Yet Mexico is not just any other debtor, but our 80 million neighbors in trouble next door.

In times of crisis, good neighbors stand by, offering assistance without meddling or presuming to know how to solve another's problems. Yet for reasons of history and culture, and because of the huge disparity between the two nations' wealth and power, the U.S. and Mexico have shared a tradition of mutual suspicion. This despite the fact that Mexican-Americans are the second largest minority in the United States.

Perhaps the invitation by President Reagan to meet with President De la Madrid in August will serve as a palliative to soothe the ill-timed accusations by Senator Jesse Helms, implicating a member of the De la Madrid family and another government official in drug trafficking, or the latent preoccupation with fraud in the 1982 presidential election victory claimed by De la Madrid, or the relentless problems of illegal immigration and border patrol. These dilemmas are real, but they must not obscure the other smoldering fires of Mexico.

What might the U.S. do in addition to any short-term rescue package, rescheduling, or suspension of payments now being considered jointly by commercial lenders, the World Bank, and the IMF?

- Offer to purchase oil for the U.S. strategic reserves from Mexico and/or consider purchases by private buyers. It makes sense to purchase oil while the price is low and while Mexico could use the dollars.
- Consider what might be done to discourage capital flight to this side of the border. How might secrecy be lifted and money be accounted for? Government prosecution of bank employees easing money-laundering is now being stepped up and should continue, but more supervision is crucial.
- Set up a multi-million dollar fund from which the private sector could borrow at reduced rates for investments in Mexican industries in order to stimulate both foreign investment and the reinvestment of exported capital.
- Jointly restructure Latin American debt as a whole, not merely that of individual countries, over a 15-20 year time frame, charging the lowest interest rates possible if regional growth is to be expected. Such a restructuring would also include an assessment of capital needs. The Report of the Inter-American Dialogue (cf. ''We, the Americas,'' *Commonweal,* June 20) recommends $20 billion in capital infusion each year for the next five years. This collaborative restructuring could begin as soon as the short-term remedy on the drawing boards is settled. Time is of the essence.

For its part, Mexico will have to set its own house in order. To step off the debt treadmill will mean using outside capital infusion to curb inflation and lower interest and exchange rates to stimulate economic growth. The delicacy of the problem, of course, is whether the short-run political costs are too steep, and whether the loans forthcoming are adequate to establish the long-run shifts necessary to produce sustained growth.

Mexico must continue to open up the economy to outsiders, reducing state controls and protectionist barricades, monitoring not merely the percentage of ownership held by foreign companies, but allowing for and encouraging the most competitive businesses. It is competitiveness *per se*, not foreign ownership, that can amend domestic business inefficiencies, modernize industry, and contribute to the GNP.

Sustained economic growth in Mexico will increase the political stabilization of the government. Yet this need not mean continued one-party domination. However, as Curtis Skinner points out in his article (page 397) describing the socio-political ramifications of the economic situation in Mexico, neither labor nor the opposition parties are in a position to offer viable alternatives to the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). These political concerns and other internal pressures for land reform and diversified exports simply cannot be brought about through outside intervention or pressure.

Finally, Mexico must deal with capital flight, a serious leak which leaves a trickle of capital flowing through its land. Capital flight enriches the few involved directly in it, both lenders and creditors, but it impoverishes the nation. While the restoration of fiscal credibility would provide the longest-lasting incentive to plug the leak, this is a long-term goal. Internal controls are necessary immediately to restore the government's political credibility.

The dangers and opportunities which lie just below the surface in Mexico deserve our undivided attention for many reasons, not least of which are proximity and size. The population of Mexico City alone is nearly half the combined populations of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Libya, Angola, and Afghanistan -- countries defined by the Reagan administration as trouble spots. If these small nations farther from our land merit a prominent place on our foreign policy agenda, what about Mexico?

LIBERTY'S LIGHT

The most impressive view of the Statue of Liberty is not from *Fortune*'s yacht, the promoters' helicopters, or even the presidential reviewing quarters. It is on foot, approaching the Statue at the base from the rear. Here, as if suddenly coming to the rim of the Grand Canyon, one encounters the Statue's monumental size and symbolism, its momentous, symphonic beauty. For a moment, feet and eyes stop, compelled by an inverted green Niagara ascending relentlessly to the golden flame.

She stands where the salt and fresh waters meet, where

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In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual summer schedule, only one issue will be published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated August 15.

death and life mingle. In the morning, she is a welcoming goddess, bathed in the dawn. In the evening she can become a stern guard. "Against the luminous sky the rays of her halo were spikes of darkness roweling in the air," wrote Henry Roth in his classic novel of the immigrants, *Call It Sleep*. "Shadow flattened the torch she bore to a black cross against flawless light — the blackened hilt of a broken sword. Liberty. The child and his mother stared again at the massive figure in wonder."

She strides, breaking the chains of tyranny. How many are left? Nuclear terror. Racism. Drugs. Unemployment. Despair. Jingoism.

Several years ago a small child was overheard telling her mother on the Staten Island Ferry as it neared the fog-enshrouded Statue, "They say the Lady in the Statue is dead." For some, no doubt. The wonder is she remains so resilient and beckoning to so many others. (A Maryknoll priest reports that his parishioners in Peru refer to the Statue as *La Virgen* of the United States.) Maria Elena, a Mexican-American mother of seven who never went beyond the sixth grade, is a migrant organizer in the Midwest. She says of her life: "Maybe what God wants us to be is very simple, to be a symbol to the people that we're suffering but can endure. Maybe that's why we don't have a very nice place with all the commodities. Maybe if we didn't have a thing to worry about, we wouldn't have this feeling, this kind of belief that's so powerful that we want to make social change and fight for justice for the rest. Maybe that will keep us going" (*Dignity: Lower Income Women Tell of Their Lives and Struggles,* University of Michigan, 1985).

In her famous poem "The New Colossus," Emma Lazarus described the Statue as "Mother of Exiles." In her short lifetime, Lazarus worked devotedly to aid Jewish immigrants from Russia. She saw in the Statue perhaps more than its creators, who were merely celebrating the Franco-American alliance. When Lazarus died of cancer the year after the Statue was unveiled, she left a remarkable impression on her friend Rose Hawthorne. It was the care the dying Lazarus received in the heart of her family that several years later led this Catholic convert, daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, to begin working with indigent cancer victims exiled to die on Blackwell's Island in the East River. "A fire was then lighted in my heart," wrote Hawthorne. "I set my whole being to endeavor to bring consolation to the cancerous poor."

Hawthorne's first hospice was close to New York harbor. From it she could see the Statue in the distance. And like the Statue, her hospice remains to this day, offering refuge at the water's edge.

The celebration will soon fade, fireworks and pious phrases ebbing from memory. The newly cleansed face of the Statue is likely to remain seared longer, a symbol of the divisions we cannot hide. Perhaps in the coming storms, withstood together, an enduring patina will emerge. Such is hope.

During the centennial restoration, workers discovered that Alexandre Eiffel's substructure — to which Frederic Bartholdi's copper sculpture is attached — had been improperly assembled. All along, the torch of Liberty and the structure of the right shoulder have been disjointed, two-feet askew. Previous restorations failed to diagnose the problem, much as the framers of the Constitution failed to deal with human slavery.

Perhaps the Statue's weakness, now repaired, should have been allowed to endure, a permanent reminder, like Jacob's limp. For true equality has yet to be achieved. As Maria Elena knows, it demands prodigious struggle. Only then will Liberty's torch be fully raised, a sanctuary and haven for all.

JUDGES & IDEOLOGY

In Scrabble, "ideology" is an eight-letter word; in editorials, it's usually a four-letter word twice over. Of course, ideology can signify a closed, all-encompassing worldview, resistant to argument or evidence and churning out answers to life's problems the way a vending machine pops out candy bars. But ideology can also mean nothing more than a well thought-out or deeply held political philosophy, and half the accusations concerning ideology come from people who are just not willing to acknowledge or examine their own.

Perhaps it's this use of ideology as a bad word that makes it so difficult to get the Senate to recognize the legitimacy of considering the ideology of presidential nominees for federal judgeships — and especially for seats on the Supreme Court. Bit by bit, however, senators are beginning to challenge the conventional notion that they must limit themselves strictly to questions of ethics and competence in deciding whether to confirm judicial candidates — a notion without basis in the Constitution or in nineteenth-century practice, and which has always led to a good deal of disingenuousness.

Mr. Reagan and other conservatives have taken to complaining about just this sort of disingenuousness. Liberal senators have called attention to the apparent lack of qualifications — and even to the bad grammar and spelling — of some Reagan judicial nominees, most notably and most recently, of Daniel Manion, named by the administration to be a Seventh Circuit judge in Chicago. "Let's be honest," says the president. "The real objection to Dan Manion is that he doesn't conform to the liberal ideology of some senators." Well, let's be honest, Mr. President. The only *qualification* of Mr. Manion is that he does conform to the ideology of the right. The *Wall Street Journal* (June 24, 1986) rushes to defend Mr. Manion: No, he was not a member of the John Birch Society but only sent that group thanks for the condolences it expressed upon the death of his Bircher father (thanks in which, by the way, he spoke warmly of the Birchers' role on the front lines of anti-Communist efforts). No, Manion didn't try to circumvent a Supreme Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of posting copies of the Ten Commandments in public classrooms, because the law declared unconstitutional involved *publicly pur-*

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chased copies of the Ten Commandments while Mr. Manion's measure, introduced in the Indiana state senate, only involved *privately donated* copies! If the debate about Mr. Manion appears to turn on ludicrous points — and ideological ones — that is because the man has no substantial legal accomplishments on which the debate could turn.

That is not the case, obviously, with Mr. Reagan's two latest judicial nominations — William H. Rehnquist and Antonin Scalia. And here the question of ideology becomes more interesting. No one questions the legal competence of both these individuals, or their personal integrity either. It is commonly said, therefore, that their confirmation by the Senate will be virtually automatic.

It shouldn't be. The Senate confirmation hearings for these two Supreme Court positions should be genuinely probing and, yes, ideological. Both nominees are men of pronounced conservative political philosophy. Justice Rehnquist, in particular, is known for writing opinions that seem less like a judicial weighing of complicated arguments than an advocate's brief. At least some scholars consider him distinctly "result-oriented," an odd trait in view of conservative sensitivity about consistency of principles. Judge Scalia has appeared more willing to uphold conservative principle even when it might not serve conservative "result." Conservatism, while declaring its opposition to government interference in the life of the citizen, has frequently displayed a good deal of reluctance to let the citizen interfere in the life of government. Both nominees need to be examined on this score.

There are, in fact, two specific areas on which the Senate hearings should focus. One is civil rights. The abiding flaw in the American experiment remains the relation between the races, black and white. Racism is a stain that marred the Constitution itself and provoked our greatest and bloodiest constitutional crisis. The Supreme Court has been at the heart of the struggle to repair that national evil, and though progress toward racial equality may no longer be as centered in the courtroom as previously, any slipping back toward institutional complacency would be national tragedy.

The 1971 hearings on Mr. Rehnquist's appointment to the Court revealed that, as a clerk, he had drawn up a memo for Chief Justice Jackson arguing that racial segregation did not offend the Constitution. The Senate rather easily accepted Rehnquist's explanation that this had merely been an exercise requested by Jackson. Unfortunately, Rehnquist's support of "judicial restraint" in the recent cases involving homosexuality and gerrymandering, as well as in many previous cases, whatever its plausibility in those areas, echoes the old states' rights rationale and could provide the needed nudge for a rollback on racial equality.

The second area is that in which the claims of national security are pitted against those of individual citizenship. In an age always poised on the brink of nuclear catastrophe, it is extremely easy — if one so desires — to rationalize all sorts of government controls as merely prohibiting shouts of "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Ideological attitudes toward the state and the demands of realpolitik will be extremely important if freedom is to survive its own defense.

Nominees Rehnquist and Scalia have many merits, not the least of which is their dissatisfaction with *Roe v. Wade*. In arguing for a senatorial discussion of their ideological leanings, we are not, as we wrote last January 31, proposing "carte blanche for simple political partisanship" ("Who Will Judge the Judges"). The ideology of candidates for the Supreme Court or the federal bench must be weighed with other factors. But it would be healthy if the Senate made it clear, as Sen. Paul Simon (D—Ill.) has said, that ideology is a "reasonable consideration" in the Senate's exercise of confirmation, just as it is in the president's exercise of appointment.

Health-care funding

A GROWING HEMORRHAGE

BENEFITS MARCH TO THE FRINGE

IN THE Pacific Northwest state of Washington, Senator Jim McDermott has been trying to persuade his colleagues in the state legislature to do something for that state's estimated 600,000 working people and their dependents who have no health insurance. They are among the 37 million people nationwide euphemistically described as "medically uninsured." According to a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study, one million Americans were denied medical care in 1983, and someone in another four million families needed medical care but didn't get it. In the Atlantic coast city of Washington, D.C., there are signs that the U.S. Congress is aware of the problem; what they'll do about it in an election year is an open question.

Action, if it comes, would not be premature. Since 1980, the number of people without a way to pay for health care has risen by a staggering 42 percent. Three-fourths of those without any coverage are working people and their dependents. The remaining one-fourth include the families of people who are unemployed, under-employed (e.g., working part-time when they need full-time work), or unemployable; they are not eligible for Medicaid, and unable to afford private insurance.

Three factors account for most of the increase in people without a way to pay for health care. First, many of the new jobs being created by our economy are low-paying jobs that do not include health benefits. Second, it is increasingly common for employers to hire people for less than full-time, in order to avoid providing health coverage. The University of Washington, for example, boasts that it has a generous policy on fringe benefits: anyone working half-time or more gets full benefits. But then, like quite a few other institutions, it deliberately and frequently hires people for 19.5 hours a week to get around the policy. And third, all of the public sources of health-care financing -- especially Medicare and Medicaid — have cut back on what they cover, how much they pay, and who

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qualifies. As a result, millions of Americans have no way to pay for health care of any kind, from any source; and hospitals and other health-care providers who treat more than just the rich are getting stuck with the bills. All three Seattle hospitals providing most of that area's charity care have large and growing deficits; one expects to exhaust its reserves within a year — at which point it will have to turn sick people away. It is not alone.

In an attempt to do something about this problem, a bipartisan group of senators (Durenberger, R-Minn.; Heinz, R-Pa.; Riegle, D-Mich.; and Kennedy, D-Mass.) and representatives (Gradison, R-Ohio; and Stark, D-Calif.) has introduced the "Health Care Improved Access Act of 1986." If this bill becomes law:

- Employers would be required to continue existing health coverage for laid-off workers for four months.
- Subsidized health insurance "risk pools" would be set up in every state for people without access to employment-based coverage and/or with medical conditions that make them ineligible for regular coverage.
- States would have to establish a mechanism to pay for hospital charity care, or develop a plan to provide health insurance to all their uninsured residents.
- Self-employed people would get tax breaks designed to encourage them to provide health insurance for their employees.
- And demonstration projects would explore ways to lower insurance costs for small businesses.

On June 9, in a crowded hearing room, the Subcommittee on Health of the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means heard fourteen witnesses support the proposal. They represented hospitals, organized labor, a health-related business group, academics, the health insurance industry, representatives of four states, an organization representing rural people, and the Catholic Health Association. Two witnesses opposed the proposal. They represented the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce. The American Medical Association, while not among the witnesses, holds a position similar to the hospitals: supportive of the concept, but seeking some modifications.

The National Association of Manufacturers faulted the plan on the grounds that it "would discourage employment-based health insurance and would interfere with state and local programs now in place." Moreover, they warned, it "would be an onerous burden, particularly on small companies, and would negatively impact the expansion of job-based health benefits."

But when they were asked whether this had been the case in those states which already have one of the bill's most significant features in place, namely some form of state-wide risk pool (those in Connecticut and Minnesota, for example, have been operating for a decade), they said they didn't know. Their members in those states had not been calling them with problems; they'd done no studies, no quick surveys of their members to back up their claims. "How do you form the basis of your opposition if you haven't taken advantage of the history of the nine states that have it?" Jake Pickle of Texas wanted to know. It needs more study according to the Chamber's representative: "I think we need to give it a little more time." The Committee has learned, Representative Stark replied with a smile, "On health and human services, 'a little more time' means, 'don't do it — ever.' "

Several of the witnesses who spoke in favor of the bill asked that it be expanded in a variety of ways. By most standards the bill's provisions are modest. Four months of continued health coverage isn't very long (its sponsors note that 70 percent of the unemployed become reemployed within four months); it wouldn't require businesses to cover new groups of workers, or require businesses with poor coverage to make improvements; federal costs would be limited to the demonstration projects plus the tax breaks for small businesses; it doesn't take on the broader health-care needs of people who can't afford to "buy into" the new risk pools; and it wouldn't create any new federal health agencies.

NO ONE AT the hearing addressed the plan in the context of the need for a national health plan of some kind. Like another recent bipartisan proposal to cover the health-care costs of pregnant women with incomes below the poverty line, or the study requested by the president of ways to meet the catastrophic health-care costs of the elderly, this proposal attempts to take on one piece of the problem and no more: how to let hospitals serve people in poor health who don't have good health insurance, without going out of business.

"The N word," namely, National health something — insurance, plan, system, service, program — is rarely mentioned these days. (For example, two exceptions are not likely to be acted on this year. Rep. Ron Dellums [D-Calif.] has introduced a National Health Service Act every Congress for a decade, and Rep. Edward Roybal [D-Calif.] has just introduced a USHealth Program Act of 1986 calling for national health insurance by 1992.) Several of those who'd testified acknowledged, when asked, that of course they would prefer to be working for something better. "National health . . . ?" Sister Caritas Geary of the Catholic Health Association echoed in reponse to a question, "That's our long-term goal. But we know it's an impossibility at the present time." One long-time health activist went a little further: "We don't even want to raise the possibility," she said, "saying it kills even the little steps politically. We all end up just doing what we can."

And so this year's version of addressing the issue gets underway: picking off small pieces of the puzzle, trying to meet a cost issue without spending money, watching as health-care costs absorb more and more of the GNP, and more and more sick people go without care. But this is an *election year*, and movement on even part of the problem is not to be sneered at. When the likes of liberal Democrat Pete Stark and conservative Republican Will Gradison can agree on both the problem and the solution, there just may be hope for progress on the health-care front. NANCY AMIDEI

(Nancy Amidei frequently reports on poverty, hunger, and human services issues in these pages.)

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GOP primaries

POLITICAL IMMERSION

ROBERTSON TESTS THE WATERS

PAT ROBERTSON is a God-hearing, tongues-speaking, miracle-believing, dominion-taking, prosperity-claiming, demon-binding, born-again biblical literalist. He is also a very successful entrepreneur, a well-educated, attractive, and articulate man with a large, ready-made television "constituency" and an enormous amount of money. The great mistake of political analysts is to assume that the second of the above characterizations has any real bearing on the first. Robertson may be more than his religious convictions and practices, but he certainly is no less. At a given point he becomes irreducible.

Pat Robertson is first and last a *religious* figure. He is now moving determinedly into the mainstream, propelled by strong political views that are founded on specific and uncompromising religious convictions. These, in turn, have existed historically *outside* the Christian mainstream. Placed in a national context, Robertson's beliefs can be seen in their real social and political proportions — proportions that appear strikingly small. Eventually, something will have to give.

It can't be Robertson. His authority among his "followers" depends to a very great extent on the integrity of his faith. And the integrity of his faith allows no room for compromise. He is defined by convictions whose foundation is eternal, unassailable, absolute.

If the "give" won't come from Robertson, neither will it come from his supporters in the conservative Christian Right. They are unlikely to quiet down voluntarily, having discovered, in their own numbers and financial resources, national visibility and respectability (especially the latter). To view most religious broadcasting is to see countless forms of what can only be called an aggressive longing for respectability. Conservative Christians share with liberals the notion that Robertson poses a triple threat: (1) should Pat Robertson run

NURSERY SCREAMS

PRISONERS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

IT'S NOT TRUE that raising children saps all your energy. I for one have had the time to make a great scientific discovery: I now know why more women haven't become grand master bridge players.

I've wondered about that ever since I saw Omar Sharif make the point on the Dick Cavett Show. He made the point very forcefully. He said, "The reason women aren't any good at bridge is that they aren't logical."

The other guest on the show was Margaret Mead, who didn't treat Omar Sharif's view very respectfully. After she stopped laughing she said the reason more women aren't grand master bridge players is, "They have more important things to do than play silly games."

Sharif, not just another pretty face but a bridge player, took umbrage and asked what women do that is so important. Somehow I knew Margaret Mead wasn't going to say, "their make-up."

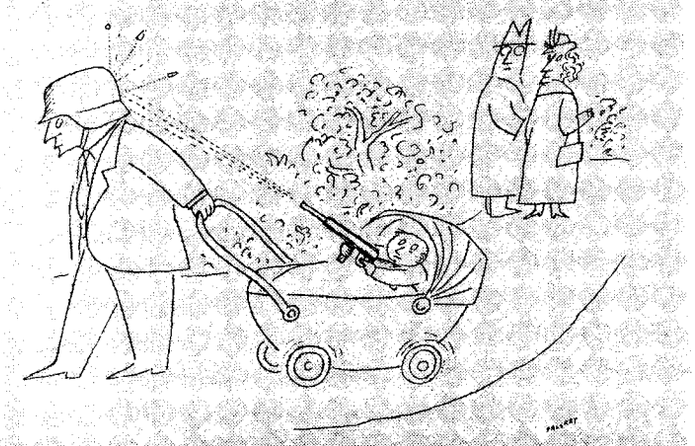
MEAD: Oh — give birth, educate the young, tend the sick, and maintain civilization.

Trump.

Although Margaret Mead took the wind out of Omar's sails, the bridge question still nagged me over the years; why *couldn't* a woman give birth, educate the young, tend the sick, maintain civilization, and score an occasional grand slam? I mean, I've had time to get born, become educated, get measles, listen to Dire Straits — and still run a marathon. Talk about a Role Model and a Renaissance Man!

Sharing the business of giving birth, educating the young, tending the sick, and maintaining civilization in my house has given me new insight into The Bridge Question. We now have two little girls, aged one month and almost three years. I agree with Bill Cosby that until your second kid is born, you're not really parents, you're a couple with a child. Only when you are taking care of two (or, God forbid, more) can you really call yourself "parents."

After a full month of really being a parent I am here to report that two adults, working flat-out, full-time, can just about cope with two children. A lot of Yuppie Papas drivel about the joys of "parenting" and "actualizing their potential." It's nice to hear that they like to change diapers and bathe their kids. But that's not the whole story. For the whole story you need a reliable narrator.



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for president, every one of a supposed 22 million fundamentalist votes is his, simply on the basis of common spiritual and moral values; (2) those particular values are prevalent enough among nonfundamentalists to bring him even more votes; (3) Robertson's large financial wellspring seals the case for numbers one and two.

What's wrong with this picture?

For one thing, it ignores a parallel from the 1984 election, in which American women — another "special interest group" — were expected to vote for one of "their own" and decided instead to cast their votes as *citizens*. Second, it fails to consider the possibility that the constriction of Robertson's beliefs renders his money, in a sense, meaningless. Exactly what is he going to buy? Access beyond his natural audience to the public at large? It seems possible that a deeper familiarity with Robertson's particular views, combined with the consideration of him for president, might prompt voters to offer him a "message" of their own, and that message wouldn't be adulatory. In short, welcome to the world beyond Nielsen ratings and sympathetic contributors. Welcome to the rest of America.

The issue, of course, is not the validity of the Christian Right's principles, but the translation of those principles into political decisions that carry judgment on other citizens' place in their own society. In a theology that claims a biblical basis for everything from a Soviet foreign policy to the existence of AIDS, nonsubscribers — depending on their interpretaion of free speech, their understanding of the will of God, and their party affiliation -- are judged as less than moral, less than spiritual, less than patriotic. This intolerance is simply natural to the character of fundamentalism. It is not, however, natural to the character of serious presidential candidates.

Unaccounted for in the recent presumption and speculation is a segment of Americans that sees itself as neither sliding toward hell on a moral banana peel nor requiring rescue from advancing religious demagoguery. There *are* people who believe it's all right for Pat Robertson to declare who are "the enemies of the Lord" — as long as he isn't running the country at the same time. These are the people who are called anti-God by religious conservatives when they question school prayer, and "repressive" by liberals when they reject the idea that morality has to be relative. These are the people who are

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My wife and I, of course, share the responsibilities of parenthood 50-50. Well . . . 20-80 — but who's counting? It's a *solid* 20. When the going gets tough I am intermittently available. Having put in a solid 20 percent of the work, I fear that something has to give. The first thing to give will be my marathons. My wife said — can you believe this? — that I couldn't take two-and-a-half hour runs every afternoon because "she needs a little help." She says it won't be that much of a deprivation because I could easily log eighteen miles a day running around the house. Our two-year-old daughter Mussolini has become a little more bossy and demanding since her sister arrived.

DAUGHTER: I don't want the blue tights, I want the red tights!

FATHER (gently, patiently): Sweetheart, wear the blue tights. I can't find the red tights.

DAUGHTER: I don't want the blue tights, they don't match!

Ten minutes later, having scoured the entire house, I return with the red tights.

DAUGHTER: George wants his shirt! (George is her doll, a little monkey who is nearly as bossy as Mussolini and, according to my daughter, "doesn't like the baby.")

FATHER (seething): I don't know where George's shirt is, and I have to get to work.

DAUGHTER: George wants his shirt! WAAAAH!

FATHER: Listen, if you don't shut up and get dressed, I am going to kick George's butt right through the window!

MOTHER: Honey, it doesn't help to lose your temper.

FATHER: I'M NOT LOSING MY TEMPER, I'M LOSING MY MIND!

In this state I wouldn't want to play bridge — not even against Omar Sharif.

There is truly no rest or comfort for the weary. Our parents, for example — the very people who once waxed lyrically on the subject of babies and family life — now chuckle knowingly and recount horror stories about our childhood antics. And seeking professional help, we received this disappointing response to our plea.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bell:

I am sorry to say that Amnesty International cannot make you *Prisoners of Conscience* this month.

Prisoners of Conscience must be nominated, not proposed by themselves.

Your description of life with an infant and a two-year-old, while heartrending, seems to our committee less compelling than what is happening in Chilean prisons and Russian mental hospitals. Admittedly, being subjected, as you put it, to "blood-curdling screams night and day, sleeplessness, and excrement" resembles torture tactics common to tyrants everywhere.

We were disturbed by your statement that although you have neither used nor advocated violence, "how long this will remain true we cannot say." Any evidence of violence would permanently disqualify you from consideration for *Prisoners of Conscience* status.

With all best wishes that in these trying times you will keep the faith, I remain,

Yours truly, Henry Hope
Secretary-General, Amnesty International

ROBERT H. BELL

(Robert H. Bell teaches English at Williams College, and airs his humor on National Public Radio.)

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forever balancing their commitment to a moral life and moral culture with their desire to live and let live. (A neat trick, yes; but *somebody's* got to do it. And somebody always has.) These Americans become a political "group" simply by their refusal to fall neatly into any political group. They are the Silent Variable.

George Will has written that Pat Robertson is looking at what he, Robertson, considers "a 'win-win' proposition. If he wins, bingo. If he looses, the attempt 'would still bring unity to the body of Christ.' " Will sees this as a losing proposition for the Republican party, worrying that Robertson "might taint the GOP with peculiarity and extremism. . . ." Robertson and Will notwithstanding, it seems that the greater risk of a Robertson campaign would be to the Christian Right itself. The risk is two-fold, putting at stake both its present appearance of spiritual unity and its future political potency.

Should Pat Robertson run for president, the explanations he will be forced to give (repeatedly) on the "religious issue" will receive their greatest scrutiny from his fellow fundamentalists — a group historically given to almost compulsive doctrinal nit-picking and hair-splitting. And should Robertson, in the course of his explanations, upset one of fundamentalism's several subgroups, he will be the agent of anything but Christian unity. (Jimmy Swaggart alone on an off day can yank the best of them through a doctrinal keyhole, and he remains ever watchful for the opportunity.)

The supposed political power of the Christian Right in recent years has existed mainly as an implied power, a threat. (Perhaps its members made *a* difference in the 1984 presidential election, but they obviously didn't make *the* difference, so lopsided was Ronald Reagan's victory.) With Pat Robertson's recent showing in the first stage of Michigan's complex and lengthy delegate selection process, that threat is again being examined seriously — almost breathlessly — by political analysts. Robertson is said to have scored a "coup" in Michigan, emerging as a "new force" in presidential politics. Maybe so. But we have seen this kind of reaction before. Yesterday's little political surprises become today's big news, to be forgotten by tomorrow's fresh surprises.

A "political" story as interesting and as relevant as the Michigan test appeared with less fanfare a week later, when it was reported that "fundamentalist preachers from coast to coast" have prepared a "prayer hit list" and are "praying for the death of their foes," one foe being Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. Revelations like this one expose Robertson's religious/political bind: if such practices are "scriptural," he cannot refute them; but as a serious presidential aspirant, he cannot endorse them.

That bind can only tighten if Robertson pursues the Republican presidential nomination. Putting the implied power of a fully politicized Christian Right to the ultimate test with the ultimate elective office would finally quantify that power. It would certainly reveal that, in political terms, the potential to influence is also the potential to antagonize. It would likely publicize the conflict and competition that have always existed among conservative Protestants. And it would surely arouse the Silent Variable.

JANET SCOTT BARLOW

(Janet Scott Barlow has written for Chronicles, Parents Magazine, Marriage and Family Living, *and the* Cincinnati Post.*)*

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

MORE THAN COINCIDENCE?

THE CHURCH'S CARE OF ITS OWN

THE TIMING was less than felicitous. The release of the bishops' third draft of the economics pastoral called *Economic Justice for All* was immediately preceded by stories in the national press about the dire economic plight of America's aging nuns. The sisters who made the parochial school system possible by teaching for little or no pay now find themselves without effective retirement and health programs. And many have been reduced to applying for welfare. As long ago as 1981 a bishops' survey showed at least one thousand nuns relying on public assistance. A more recent study, *Retirement Needs Survey of United States Religious*, was slated for release in the same week as the draft of the pastoral. Its conclusion is that it will take at least $2 *billion* to right the situation. So far the bishops have provided a sixty-thousand-dollar emergency fund and earmarked two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for an office and a staff to make further studies.

Business reporters with advance copies of this recent survey in hand were not slow to point out the irony of the coincidental releases. The American bishops "who for two years have been deliberating how to improve the moral quality of the U.S. economy, are facing a large moral problem in their own economic house," wrote John J. Fialka in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Granted, the dimensions of the problem of the sisters' poverty has been hidden, even from the bishops, over the years. Religious orders, guarding their independence and unprepared for long-range planning, have tended to keep their troubles to themselves. The attitude which prevailed in many small communities is realistically explored in an excellent novel about a community *in extremis* by Sister Irene Mahoney, O.S.U. (*An Accidental Grace*, St. Martin's, 1982). A nun is trying to explain her order's predicament to a lay friend. They must, she tells him, sell "St. Aidan's," their school and convent:

"But after all these years there

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must be money so that you can continue to live. You say that for many years this was a first-rate school.''

''It was, and it did very well financially.''

''So?''

''So whatever money came in was used to make it a better school — to build another building, buy more equipment, redecorate the dormitories. The convent kept nothing except what was necessary for daily needs.''

''Insurance?'' David looked baffled.

Ruth shook her head. ''No insurance, no pension, no Social Security. Just a daily invocation to God, the Father of the poor, and to St. Joseph, who was official patron of material needs.''

''So now there is nothing?''

Ruth nodded. ''And each year there will be a little less.''

Yet the nuns of the fictional St. Aidan's are among the lucky ones. Their school was a private one. It belonged to them and they could sell it. But small communities whose chief work was teaching in the schools owned by parishes and dioceses, and who did so for stipends barely covering their needs for food, housing, and clothes, have no such recourse. One group of sisters in New York, reported the *Journal*, struggled on teaching in a poor inner-city neighborhood, all the while falling into deeper and deeper debt to their undertaker for their frequent funerals. Until they were rescued by the emergency fund, the sisters had not complained or asked for help.

We can sympathize with the bishops who are now faced with the result of some sisters' independence and unworldliness. We can sympathize, too, with those among them who feel that the problem was not of their making — that they inherited it. And we can sympathize with the hard-pressed ordinaries of small dioceses who say that they simply do not have the funds to come to the sisters' relief. But we must be uneasily aware that the situation has been known to them at least since 1981 and that its amelioration has not been given high priority. It

constitutes an embarrassment. The church has not taken care of its own.

Lay response to the press reports of the sisters' distress has ranged through expressions of dismay, shocked surprise, and indifference. Real outrage seems to have been reserved to those who were taught by the nuns in the ''good old days,'' like the man who wrote to *The Washington Post:*

> Considering the resources of the Catholic church in the United States, and the millions we send overseas annually to the Vatican and to foreign missions, I am scandalized that my church has not taken care of its own religious, especially the nuns who nurtured the faith.

The writer urges a moratorium on all collections for funds ''destined for overseas'' — a response which augurs that he, and others like him, will make a poor audience for the pastoral's sections on the global economy.

The weakest part of all three versions of the economic pastoral, and the one with fewest spelled-out policy recommendations, has been the section on economic justice within the church. In the third version, the drafters have taken pains to point out that the church is more than an institution employing people and carrying out service programs. ''It is the community of Christ's disciples living out his message.'' True enough. And the prophetic role is part of that. The right to proclaim justice abides no matter how flawed the example, however large the beam in the eye. Nevertheless, the perception of the flaw is bound to weaken the response to that which is proclaimed.

In my last column on the bishops upcoming synod, a topic I will return to in a later column, I referred to the Dean R. Hoge study on future church leadership. It showed among other things that 61 percent of the lay-persons questioned disagreed with the statement: ''The Catholic bishops should take public stands on some political issues such as the arms race or the American economic system.'' If that 61 percent is augmented by those disturbed by the economic plight of the American sisters and those indifferent to it (who are probably indifferent to any needy), the hope for a significant Catholic response to the pastoral is certainly somewhat illusory.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

Of several minds: *David R. Carlin, Jr.*

EARNING & LEARNING

A NATION ILL-PREPARED

I HAPPEN to be a member of a perfectly wonderful organization called The New England Board of Higher Education. As such, it is my duty to go two or three times a year to conferences at which we talk about the linkage between education and the economy. The discussions, frankly, are usually a bit on the dull side. After all, how many new and exciting ways are there of making the point — the perfectly valid point — that the economic future of the region and the nation depends heavily on the quality of education? But the company is both dignified and pleasant, the food good, the drinks ample, and the accommodations splendid.

I attended the most recent of these con-

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ferences the other day, and to my astonishment the high point was not the food and drink but an exciting discussion of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century* — the report issued in May by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy.

This Carnegie report calls for an extensive restructuring of the K-through-12 teaching profession: abolition of undergraduate programs in teacher education, replacing them with a Master in Teaching graduate program; creation of a national (though non-governmental) board having the capacity to certify teachers; establishment of a system of teacher ranks, beginning with "licensed" teachers at the foot of the career ladder, proceeding through "certified" and "advanced certified" steps, and culminating in "lead teachers" at the top; paying teachers enough to enable teaching to compete with other professions in attracting the best and brightest recruits; granting teachers more of the autonomy characteristic of genuine professions; and holding schools (as opposed to individual teachers) accountable for their results.

At first glance this looks like one more utopian proposal, which, after a brief flurry of interest, will be filed in the great national wastebasket, where we file the typical report on education. But what promises to make this report strikingly different from most others is that among the members of the twelve-person task force that produced it are Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, and Mary Hatwood Futrell, president of the National Education Association. Without the backing of the two great national teacher unions, it is virtually impossible for any major transformation of the teaching profession to occur; with their backing, almost anything is possible. Just how far the unions are willing to go should be clearer when they conclude their annual national conventions in early July.

A Nation Prepared tells us the same thing scores of other education reports in the last few years have told us. First, if the United States is to compete successfully in a rapidly evolving world economy, we'll have to improve the quality of our "human capital." When (to use an example given in the report) South Korea — which is becoming relative to Japan what Japan had previously become relative to the United States — can produce video home recorders with workers who work twelve hours per day for seven days a week while earning a mere $3,000 per year, it is clear the U.S. won't be able to meet this competition by employing workers who will work equally hard and long while being equally ill-paid. Our competitive edge, if we are to have one, will depend on our having a better quality of mind. We have to be better trained, better informed, more imaginative, more creative. Second, if our school system is to do its share in producing this enhanced national intelligence, we'll have to attract highly talented people into the elementary-secondary teaching profession and then give them the tools to do their job. That is, teachers will have to be paid more, given greater individual and corporate autonomy, and rewarded (though not necessarily through the dubious device of "merit pay") for their accomplishments.

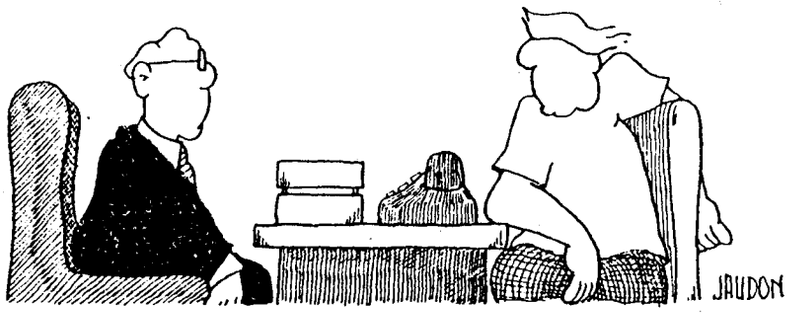
While I don't disagree with any of this, I have to confess that I grow nervous whenever I hear anyone justify education in terms of its economic benefits. Not that I doubt it has economic benefits; far from it. And it's not that I don't understand the necessity of stressing the economic pay-off in order to sell the idea of greater spending on education to governors, legislators, school board members, taxpayers, etc. After all, anyone who attempted to justify an education budget by pointing out, say, that Aristotle has revealed to us that knowing is the most godlike of human activities would be hauled off to a lunatic asylum.

But I've spent many years of my life as a college teacher, and that sometimes painful experience has left me with the conviction that no student is more impossible to reach than the one who is most thoroughly sold on the economic justification of education. Holding the premise that learning is a mere means to a vocational end, such a student concludes — and rightly so, granted the premise — that knowledge is of no intrinsic value. This student also concludes that the instrumental value of education diminishes in proportion to its remoteness from his or her vocational goal.

Now, since I have the grave misfortune to teach a subject (sociology) which has little direct relevance to most vocations and, worse still, another subject (philosophy) which has no direct relevance to anything under the sun, semester after frustrating semester I find myself casting pearls to a certain number of such students, who not only scorn to pick them up, but resent the fact that the college's queer requirements are forcing them to spend so much time away from worthwhile subjects like nursing and business management, meanwhile pitying me that my brain chemistry has gone so awry as to get me exercised about such pointless issues as social structure and epistemology.

While it is true that education is good for the economy, this is a dangerous truth, suitable for mature audiences only. Be sure to read *A Nation Prepared*. But then lock it up in the cabinet where you keep your gin and Scotch — away from the young people.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.



"Sure I know what calculus and chemistry are. Calculus is, like, when you leave your pocket calculator at home, and chemistry is, like, your interpersonal relationships."

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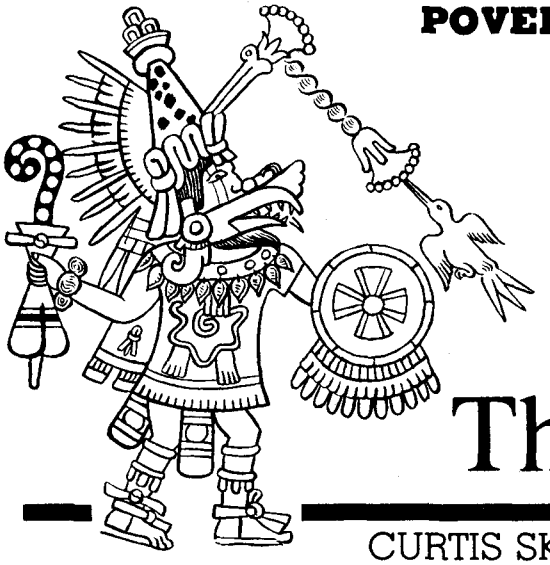

The next earthquake

CURTIS SKINNER

THE COLLAPSE in international oil prices has put the fear of the people into Mexico's De la Madrid government, and for good reason. A projected shortfall of $6 billion this year has pushed Mexico back to the brink of default on its outstanding foreign debt of $97 billion and made three years of grinding economic austerity imposed on the poor and working classes into a mere "exercise in hunger." Having colluded with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cut popular living standards by almost half since 1982 in order to pay the country's commercial bank creditors, President Miguel De la Madrid is extremely reluctant to take further belt-tightening measures for fear of driving a sorely-pressed population into open revolt.

To avoid a forced default by Mexico that would set a dangerous precedent for the rest of debt-strapped Latin America, the Reagan administration is arm-twisting U.S. banks to come up with at least half of the $4 billion in fresh credits Mexican finance officials say they will need in 1986.

Enter the Baker Plan, the Reagan administration's touted "growth solution" to the third-world debt problem. The plan, formulated by Treasury Secretary James Baker at last October's IMF-World Bank joint meeting in Seoul, calls for increased lending on more flexible terms by multilateral agencies and commercial banks to debtor countries who undertake "structural reforms" to promote foreign and domestic private investment and liberalize trade. The gist of the Baker scheme — which proposes an inadequate $29 billion in fresh credits to fifteen countries over the next three years, but offers no relief for existing debt burdens — is using third-world debt dependency as a wedge to dismantle nationalist barriers to United States capital and exports. Having pursued a market-oriented economic strategy for the past year, De la Madrid expressed support for the Baker initiative at last January's Mexicali meeting with President Reagan and appears willing to take further liberalizing measures consistent with the plan. This policy may win Mexico its new loans and increase export earnings, but it will do so by further sacrificing popular living standards, perpetuating the debt trap, and retreating from the country's decades-long effort to develop an independent, industrial economy.

The seeds of Mexico's debt bondage lie, ironically enough, in the country's emergence as an oil power. In the late 1970s, the Jose Lopez Portillo administration borrowed heavily in international credit markets to finance an ambitious industrial development program based on enormously expanded petroleum production. A huge chunk of this money, however — perhaps as much as half of the total — was never invested in Mexico at all, but ended up deposited in Swiss bank accounts by corrupt government functionaries or used by businessmen for secure investments and real estate purchases in the United States and Europe. The cost of servicing Mexico's variable-interest loans, meanwhile, increased substantially starting in 1979, as the United States pursued a tight monetary policy to fight inflation. In August 1982, with only $200 million remaining in its central bank, Mexico was forced to suspend commercial debt principal payments and go cup-in-hand to Washington for a $10 billion bailout. This encouraged other Latin American countries to publicly acknowledge their unserviceable debts and so touched off the world debt crisis. As part of the rescue package, the incoming De la Madrid government agreed to follow a three-year austerity program monitored by the IMF.

DE LA MADRID tried hard to be a good boy for the bankers. Mexico played a key role blocking the formation of a Latin American debtors' cartel in 1983-84, and the country's harsh economic retrenchment strategy served as Washington's model for the region. As is often the case with IMF "structural adjustment" programs, the austerity burden fell mainly on the poor and working classes. The government slashed vital consumer subsidy programs, allowing the prices of such food staples as rice, beans, and tortillas to increase severalfold. De la Madrid also sold off dozens of parastatal enterprises, con-

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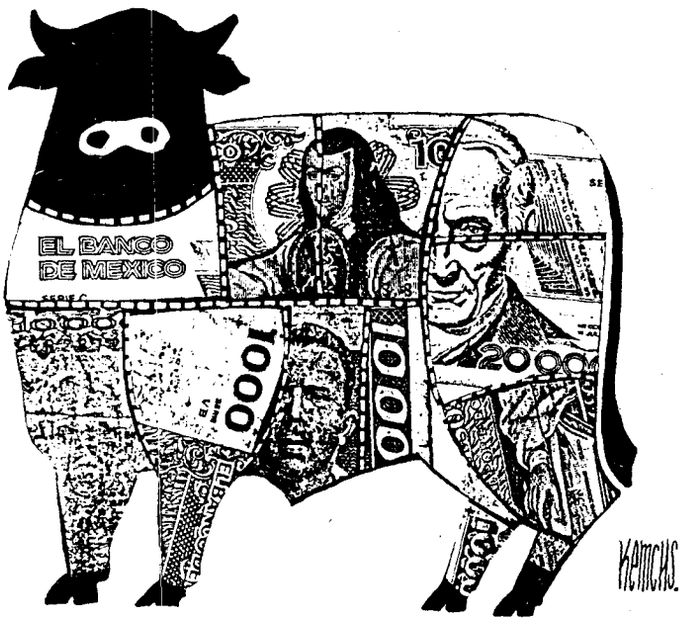
tributing to a 40 percent unemployment rate that has thrown legions of grown men on the streets of Mexico City to sell Chiclets and eat fire for handouts. In collaboration with Mexico's quasi-official trade union organization, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the government held wages well below annual inflation rates averaging 60 percent over the last three years, cutting the standard of living for most Mexicans almost by half. By late 1985, workers earning the minimum wage (about three dollars a day) were spending over 70 percent of their income on the basic food basket.

De la Madrid's assault on popular living standards was rewarded with a major debt rescheduling, but financial "recovery" on the IMF's terms continued to elude Mexico. A critical problem was the steady decline in international oil prices beginning in 1983. Oil exports account for 70 percent of Mexico's foreign exchange earnings and the price shortfall severely undercut government savings.

Another important factor, less often acknowledged by the political/business elite who exhorted Mexican workers to tighten their belts for the good of the country, was the headlong flight of capital from Mexico. Economists estimate that up to $60 billion left the country from 1977 to 1984, and up to $5 billion may have been siphoned out the first six months of 1985 solely through the practice of under-invoicing exports and over-invoicing imports. This capital flight — by far the largest of any debtor nation — has done enormous harm to the country by depleting foreign exchange reserves, reducing the government's tax base, drying up investment resources, and stifling economic growth. As a result, the government found itself compelled to increase its borrowing and deficit spending, consequently driving up interest rates, worsening inflation, and devaluing the peso. By September 1985, Mexico had fallen out of compliance with its IMF austerity goals and was barred from further borrowing; in October, only two months after signing a new commercial debt rescheduling agreement, Finance Minister Jesús Silva Herzog (who was ousted last month as finance minister following sharp differences within the De la Madrid cabinet) had to request from the bankers a six-month extension on principal payments.

Consequently, the Saudi Arabian-instigated oil price plunge this year caught Mexico at its most vulnerable moment since 1982. The country's outstanding foreign debt is bigger than ever, with servicing charges estimated at $11 billion, and the total public debt service burden (foreign and domestic) accounting for almost half of Mexico's 1986 federal budget. In this desparate strait, De la Madrid has two apparent choices: to declare a unilateral debt payment moratorium or opt for the temporary relief afforded by the Baker Plan. Having ruled out the first as "irresponsible," the Mexican president is pressing ahead to open his protected economy to foreign trade and investment, as called for under the Reagan scheme. Among recent liberalizing measures, De la Madrid has revised foreign investment laws to permit majority equity by non-Mexicans in new companies; opened Mexico's internal market to the foreign-owned *maquiladora* assembly-and-export plants; lowered general import requirements; and announced Mexico's decision to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The Baker/De la Madrid strategy for attracting business and promoting exports requires keeping wages "competitive" (low), maintaining a brutal rate of peso devaluation, and taking further steps to privatize the mixed economy and eliminate state subsidies. Consistent with this approach, De la Madrid announced another round of budget cuts and state enterprise sales in a major February 1986 speech on economic policy and the debt.

The net effect of these measures would be to strengthen foreign over domestic capital and restructure the economy to the dictates of the world market. The competitive pressures



unleashed by joining GATT and dismantling protective barriers may force stronger companies to become more efficient. However, they will certainly drive many small Mexican manufacturers out of business, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs, as will the *maquiladoras'* foray into the domestic market. Lifting equity restrictions on foreign investment also works against national industrial development. Studies in *Excelsior* and in *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* have shown that transnational corporations usually enter the market by taking over an existing Mexican firm — displacing domestic capital — and use their size and technological "know-how" to dominate the most dynamic industrial sectors, particularly capital goods. In current bilateral trade and investment negotiations, the United States is pressing Mexico to water down its provisions for technology transfer and to strengthen patent protections, which would help the transnationals maintain their technological monopoly.

Meanwhile, Mexico's policy of wage restraints, consumer subsidy cuts, and divestment of state enterprise constrains development of the domestic market. Though some of the money-losing public corporations up for sale are pure bureaucratic boondoggles, others provide subsidized goods and ser-

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vices to business and consumers that cannot profitably be replaced. If this strategy produces immediate fiscal savings and economic growth as a short-term distortion, in the long run it undermines the country's financial integrity by: reducing the state's internal revenue base, increasing the carrying cost of the unemployed and marginal sectors, and compelling excessive reliance on fickle foreign markets for economic security. It is a recipe for continued dependence on external borrowing and petroleum exports.

De la Madrid faces a mounting political challenge to this unpopular program. After fifty-six uninterrupted years in power, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is caught in the throes of a legitimacy crisis provoked by prolonged economic decline, the party's spectacular mismanagement of the national oil patrimony (a deeply felt issue), and recent examples of gross bureaucratic corruption and electoral fraud. The PRI's ability to co-opt and buy off disaffected social groups in time-honored fashion has been sapped by years of austerity. Now the party faces an unprecedented challenge to its authority from the political right and left as well as from a burgeoning grassroots movement. Though no rival organization is capable of competing on equal terms with the PRI's huge political machine, this popular mobilization could wrest some important social concessions from De la Madrid while laying the groundwork for political change.

ON THE electoral front, the rightist National Action Party (PAN) has been a thorn in the PRI's side, particularly in the important northern states of Chihuahua, Sonora, and Nuevo León. While PAN advocates a vague laissez-faire business philosophy, its appeal to many Mexicans is not ideological. Some supporters see National Action as more responsive to local interests than the highly-centralized PRI, but most votes for PAN, Mexico's largest opposition party, are votes against the government.

The PRI has responded to PAN's growing power at the polls with ham-handed fraud and repression, provoking PAN street protests that have turned violent. Ballot-box stuffing and falsified voting lists robbed PAN gubernatorial candidate Adalberto Rosas Lopez of a likely victory in the important Sonora race last July. In December and January of that election year, a rash of PAN-led mass protests broke out around the country against PRI vote-rigging in municipal elections. In the southern state of Chiapas, PAN militants occupied municipal offices in numerous towns and had to be forcibly removed by the police at the cost of seven lives. Demonstrators in the important central provincial city of San Luis Potosi torched the municipal palace on New Year's Eve and were also dispersed with bloodshed by the security forces.

Given this confrontational background, the local elections scheduled for Chihuahua this July stand as a watershed in Mexico's political history. President De la Madrid is under considerable pressure from the United States, backed by the creditor bankers, to avoid a repeat of last year's farce that would further discredit the PRI and undermine the system's long-term stability. On the other hand, PRI hardliners like CTM chief Fidel Velasquez oppose any weakening of the party's control at this time of acute economic strain. At stake is the state governorship, which PAN candidate and Ciudad Juárez mayor Francisco Barrio Berrazas stands to win in clean elections, according to the polls. The bets are that the PRI, never before having relinquished a governorship, will turn to massive fraud once again. Should this occur, there is a high potential for statewide violence since PAN controls over 60 percent of Chihuahua's municipalities, including the major cities.

Another symptom of a deep lack of confidence in the PRI and growing mass politicization is the emergence of independent self-help groups in the wake of last September's devastating earthquakes in Mexico City. The quakes — which caused $6 billion in damage, killed up to 20,000 people, and left another 130,000 homeless — have had a profound impact on the Mexican psyche, greatly adding to the prevailing climate of crisis and insecurity, but also inspiring impressive examples of popular initiative to cope with the tragedy. Rejecting government assistance, numerous volunteer groups sprang up around the city in the days following the disaster to channel private relief to the victims, known as *damnificados*. The De la Madrid administration, meanwhile, has come under strong criticism for corruption and inefficiency in aid administration, and for its failure to provide long-term relief for the *damnificados*, tens of thousands of whom are still camped out on city streets. The United Front of Earthquake Victims, a grassroots organization claiming 100,000 members, has held regular street demonstrations demanding new housing and urging that money spent repaying the foreign debt be used for earthquake reconstruction.

The key roadblock to both progressive political change and a socially responsible resolution of Mexico's debt crisis is the PRI's stranglehold on the country's major labor organizations and the weakness of the left, two aspects of the same problem. Since the "union insurgency" movement for political independence and internal democracy was crushed in the 1970s, the left, divided into eight small parties, has had a minimal presence in the mass organizations that carry decisive social weight in Mexico. However, the oil price plunge and redoubled austerity have given union bureaucrats like CTM chief Velasquez new cause for worry about restiveness in the ranks. The left wields a tremendously potent political weapon by linking De la Madrid's wage policy to Mexico's national subjugation under the foreign debt, forced oil sales, and the Baker Plan. The Communist-led United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), and social democratic Mexican Workers Party (PMT) have moved aggressively to exploit the issue in recent months. A left-organized Mexico City demonstration on February 6 drew 50,000 marchers from 122 workers', peasants', and political organizations to demand wage increases, a debt moratorium, and repudiation of the Baker Plan. Passing in front of the U.S. embassy, marchers shouted, "Thieving government, you're sold to the gringos."

With oil prices in a long-term decline, Mexico's foreign

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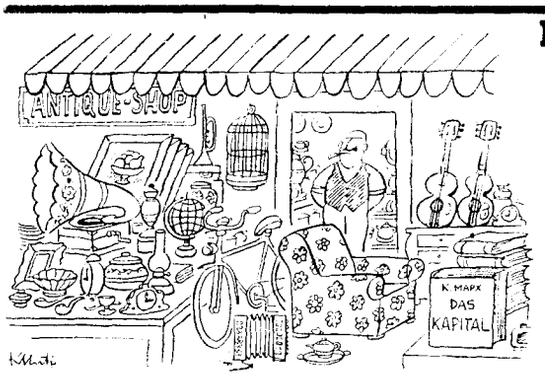
debt is unpayable, as even De la Madrid cabinet members privately acknowledge. The only question is whether default is managed to benefit the bankers or the Mexican people. The De la Madrid policy of continuing full interest payments with fresh credits and rolling over the accumulated principal lets the banks keep the loans formally in good standing and their profits intact. The cost to Mexico is ever-deepening debt dependency, and the banks also lose in the long run by increasing their overall exposure as they postpone the day of reckoning.

THE ALTERNATIVE to this *de facto* default is a unilateral payment moratorium or flat-out debt annulment on Mexico's part. Mexican business leaders and government officials have warned direly that such a step would provoke crippling economic retaliation from the United States, including a trade embargo and suspension of new credits. These fears are exaggerated. Mexico is neither Cuba nor Nicaragua. It is in fact the United States' third-largest trading partner after Canada and Japan. A $35 billion trade cut-off would have sharply negative effects for the U.S. economy, particularly in a Southwest already battered by plunging oil prices, and is not a credible policy option for the Reagan administration. As for a credit suspension, Mexico only stands to gain by halting the downward debt spiral, and in any case, could make up the loss from its payments savings.

A three-to-five-year total debt payment moratorium, with future interest payments limited to 20 percent of the total value of exports, would give Mexico vital breathing space to put its financial house in order, pursue economic development, and begin to redress workers' living standards. A more equitable, but riskier, option is simply to cancel the debt, preferably in conjunction with other Latin American debtors. As Fidel Castro noted at last summer's debt conference in Havana, repudiating the regional public debt would help compensate for the "illegitimate transfers" Latin America has made to the developed world in recent years in the form of excessively high interest rates, an overvalued dollar, deteriorating terms of trade, and capital flight. But the real point is that the working classes of poor nations like Mexico should not be held responsible for debts they neither contracted nor benefited from — especially when the creditors are the wealthiest financial institutions and governments in the world. (Citibank, Mexico's largest creditor, made *$1 billion* in 1985 profits.) For Mexico and much of the rest of the third world, progress depends on a clean break from the debt tar baby.

EXAMINING LIBERATION THEOLOGY



Christians & the class struggle

JOHN C. CORT

IN AUGUST 1984, and again in April 1986, liberation theology hit the front pages of the world's newspapers. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the controversial prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued two instructions that either explicitly or implicitly criticized liberation theologians.

The second was more positive than the first. Far, far too long, repetitive, and abstract, it made one yearn for the day when seminaries will insist that degrees in theology will be awarded only to those who have passed a Good Writing course. But in effect it justified the *New York Times* headline [April 6, 1986]: "Vatican Backs Struggle by Poor to End Injustice." The negative part followed in the subhead: "But Document also Sees New Forms of Slavery."

Neither instruction quoted or mentioned any liberation theologians. Not so understandable was the failure to quote Marx, especially when Ratzinger, in the first instruction, made such sweeping generalizations as this: "Atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and his rights, are at the core of Marxist theory." A case could be made for the statement, but it should be made.

Another weakness of the first instruction was the false impression that absolute pacifism is part of Catholic teaching, that violence in pursuit of justice is never justified. Fortunately, this was corrected in the second instruction. Someone must have reminded Ratzinger that Paul VI, true to the teaching of Aquinas, had written in 1967 that "a revolutionary uprising" could be justified "where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country" (*Populorum Progressio*, 30 and 31).

In fact, any number of Latin American countries may have

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qualified as such tyrannies. You have to ask yourself, "if I lived in such a country, and I were young and healthy, shouldn't I be out there in the bush with the guerrillas, fighting to free the people from hunger and oppression?" And a second question: "If I didn't have the courage to join the guerrillas, would I have the right to complain very bitterly because those who did have the courage also had some crazy Marxist-Leninist ideas which they proceeded to implement once the tyrant had been overthrown?"

Bitterly perhaps, but not very bitterly.

Karl Popper, sitting safely somewhere in England, once gave this excellent advice to revolutionaries: "The use of violence is justified only under a tyranny which makes reforms without violence impossible, and it should have only one aim — to bring about a state of affairs which makes reforms without violence possible."

But then, Popper did not live in Latin America, waiting half a lifetime for an honest election, then see a man elected who had promised "reforms without violence" and watch him either: (a) sell out to the rich and the military, or (b) if he meant business, be replaced by the military in behalf of the rich, often with the overt or covert assistance of the United States of America, leaving hunger and oppression precisely where they were before.

Small wonder that "reformism" and "compromise" and "democracy" (usually with the prefix "bourgeois") and "United States of America" have become dirty words in Latin America and frequently appear so in the writings of liberation theologians.

All this being cheerfully, or sadly, admitted, one must also admit that there is ground for criticizing liberation theology. And let us take the best of its representatives, Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest who in 1971 published what is still regarded as its Magna Carta, *A Theology of Liberation*.

More than any other person Gutierrez has been responsible for yanking the attention of us comfortable, complacent Christians of the North and forcing us to focus on the misery of the South, compelling us to consider to what extent we share in responsibility for that misery. He has also done more than any other person to place the question of Christian socialism on the agenda of the Catholic church and the whole contemporary world.

LET US focus on the question of Marxism, since that is where Cardinal Ratzinger laid special stress. In 1976 a Methodist missionary in Peru named Dow Kirkpatrick interviewed Gutierrez for the *Christian Century*:

KIRKPATRICK: What are the main principles of Marxism which liberation theology finds useful?

GUTIERREZ: I would make the question more precise. I don't believe that liberation theology needs to decide which aspects are important in Marxism. Liberation theology does not evaluate the Christian and non-Christian in Marxism. [Marxism] provides an analysis of the surrounding reality for Christians and non-Christians alike in the struggle for freedom.

Actually, Gutierrez himself, in the last sentence of his response, has decided that Marxist analysis is an important and valuable aspect of Marxism. But let us ignore this and extract a few Marxist notions from his writing to consider whether, in fact, they do provide "an analysis of the surrounding reality" which might prove useful in "the struggle for freedom."

In chapter 10 of *A Theology of Liberation* there is a series of beautiful reflections on the Gospel, particularly on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the vision of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). This is Gutierrez at his best. He concludes from the commandment to feed, clothe, and shelter Christ in the poor that there is a political obligation involved:

> Charity is today a "political charity," according to the phrase of Pius XII. Indeed, to offer food or drink in our day is a political action; it means the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to themselves the value of the work of others. This transformation ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society, that is, the private ownership of the means of production.

And what is this radical change? It is the total elimination of private ownership. Lest we think that Gutierrez may have changed his mind since he wrote the book in 1971 or saw it published by Orbis Books in 1973, consider a statement from his *Power of the Poor in History* in 1983:

> [The] revolutionary struggle . . . questions the existing social order in its very roots and insists on the involvement of popular power in the construction of a society of genuinely equal and free persons. It insists on a society in which private ownership of the means of production is eliminated, because private ownership of the means of production allows a few to appropriate the fruits of the labor of many, and generates the division of society into classes, whereupon one class exploits another. It insists on a society in which, by appropriating the means of production, the masses appropriate their own political management as well, and definitive freedom, thereby occasioning the creation of a new social consciousness (pp. 37-38).

The first sentence and the declarative part of the second sentence seem to refer to the revolutionary struggle in Latin America, but the rest of the second sentence, the rationale for all the rest, is clearly for Gutierrez, as it was for Marx, a universal principle.

This is extraordinary, for Latin America's economy is primarily agricultural and what the Latin American peasants, or the vast majority anyway, want is a piece of land of their own. There is no question about that. And I have yet to see a plea by Gutierrez or any other liberation theologian for the right of the peasant to own land, free from the fear of expropriation by the state.

Let me pursue the point by reference to the founding convention of Christians for Socialism at Santiago, Chile, in 1972. This convention was composed largely of Latin American priests, and the final document was written by a committee that included Gutierrez and two other prominent liberation theologians, Hugo Assman, a German priest who has worked

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in Brazil and Costa Rica, and an Italian priest, Giulio Girardi.

The document nowhere mentions the peasants, even as "farm laborers," but there are many references to "the proletariat" and "the working class." The large Chilean delegation came in with a report that does mention the peasants, but mainly to rebuke the peasants because they are "attached to the ownership of land," a value that is "part and parcel of the dominant bourgeois ideology."

This document also rebukes "many segments of the proletariat" because "they have been led astray by a tradition of labor unionism that is economics-oriented." No kidding. (Quotes from *Christians and Socialism*, Orbis, 1975, p. 78.)

Liberation theologians, including Gutierrez, make a point of contrasting their method, which, they say, proceeds inductively from "the praxis of the poor" toward theoretical conclusions, with the deductive methods of European theologians, who allegedly impose their theoretical conclusions from above onto the praxis of the poor.

I suggest that liberation theologians, including Gutierrez, are doing precisely the kind of thing they accuse the European theologians of doing. They are imposing the European abstractions, or conclusions, of Karl Marx onto the Latin American peasant whose actual "praxis" cries out for his own land and by no means wants to be submerged in some collective farm owned and operated by the state, exchanging one landlord for another who is even more powerful and impersonal.

LET US review some of Marx's abstractions. He insisted that "wages and private property are identical" and that the only way the workers could ever enjoy "real human life" and rid themselves of alienation, estrangement, and "all the muck of ages," was to make a revolution that would do away with private property and the wage relationship so that we could all "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as [we] have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic" (cf. Marx's "Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844," pp. 65, 66, 98, and "The German Ideology," pp. 124, 157, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, Norton, 1972).

In the process, you see, division of labor, another enslaving phenomenon, would also be done away with because, as Marx confidently assured us, "private property and division of labor are identical expressions." Of course, Marx did not live to enjoy life in the Soviet Union or other Marxist countries where wages and division of labor exist very happily, or unhappily, without private property.

If all this seems rather foolish, that is because it is, and we can't begin to understand why it is so foolish until we rip away the veil of illusion that has been draped over the figure of Karl Marx and has persuaded so many smart people that because he was a genius; because he could write so profoundly about Hegel and Feuerbach; because he could turn out a good, readable history of the 1848 Revolution and the Paris Commune; because he could fill three unreadable volumes with statistics about the horrors of English capitalism in the nineteenth century and murky theories about surplus value, sliding back and forth between a formula based on subsistence wages and another based on actual wages, theories that altogether were not as clarifying as the medieval notions of just wage/just profit/just price; because he had some valuable insights about the pervasive power of the economic factor; because finally — give him credit — he was consumed with a great, burning hatred of injustice and knew how to communicate it to others in a flaming phrase, that therefore — therefore — he *really knew* the life of men and women working in the world.

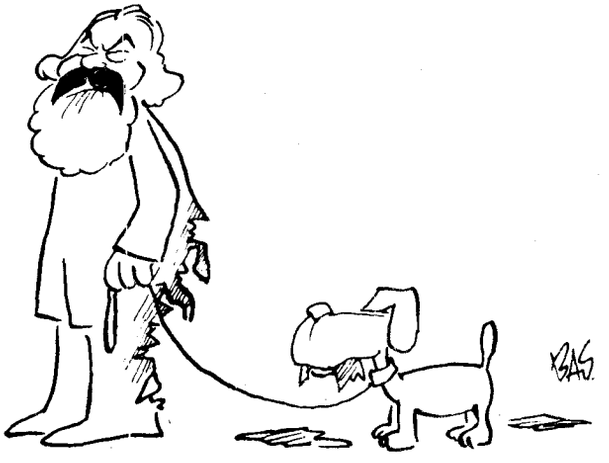
He did not. He suffered from *Godwin's Disease*. I call it Godwin's Disease after William Godwin, a philosophical anarchist and father-in-law of the poet Shelley, about whom the British historian Alexander Gray wrote, "Never was there anyone who was more entirely the embodiment of intellect and reason . . . It follows from this peculiarly intellectual bias that he was utterly destitute of common sense." Intellectuals themselves have a word for it, reductionism, but it only covers one part of the full, deadly pathology.

Take, for example, those absurdities about private property and wage labor. Marx probably never worked for a wage in his entire life, but two minutes of careful thought should have reminded him that the wage relationship is just one more power relationship among thousands, not as common or as potentially abusive as the husband-wife relationship or the parent-child relationship, but very common and potentially very abusive, or subject to abuse.

Actually, the wage relationship can be, and often has been, abused by wage-earners, as in the case of powerful, short-sighted unions that force employers to pay unjustly high wages, thereby forcing consumers to pay unjust prices, and sometimes forcing employers out of business and union members into unemployment.

Let us concede that in the case of Marx in England in the nineteenth century, or Gutierrez in Peru in the twentieth, the abuse of wage relationships was and is so common that there would naturally be a temptation to believe that if one could only do away with it, injustice and alienation might perish from the earth. But how? By making the state the universal employer? No chance.

Jean Jaurès, the great French non-Marxist socialist who was



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assassinated for his anti-war stand in 1914, had enough common sense to see that. He wrote:

> Delivering men to the state, conferring upon the government the effective direction of the nation's work, giving it the right to direct all the functions of labor, would be to give a few men a power compared to which that of the Asiatic despot is nothing, since their power stops at the surface of society and does not regulate economic life.

Michael Harrington put it more succinctly when he reminded us that "any fool can nationalize."

Of course, you could replace the individual employer or corporation with a workers' or peasants' cooperative, so that the workers, or peasants, on the basis of one-person-one-vote, instead of the capitalists' one-share-one-vote, elect the board of directors.

This is a much better idea than ownership by the state because it is real economic democracy, and the best short definition of socialism is the extension of democratic process from the political to the economic sphere.

Then you must quickly remind yourself that if the cooperative is to survive, the board of directors must appoint a competent manager who has *power* to insist on performance by the workers. And the cooperative must pay a regular *wage* to the workers, in addition to sharing any profits. With peasants, or farmers, whether the co-op is a marketing or producing operation, regular income must be assured to the members, but will more likely take the form of share-cropping and profit-sharing, supplemented by substantial family holdings — *private property*.

Finally, you should reflect on the significant fact that a cooperative, if it is a true cooperative and not a creature of the state, is itself a form of *private property* and considerably more private than a corporation owned by stockholders who don't give a damn about the company beyond the size and frequency of dividends.

WE COME now to the question of class struggle, an aspect of liberation theology that particularly disturbs Cardinal Ratzinger. Gutierrez points out that class struggle has been and remains a historical reality. This is true. From the beginning of time there has been struggle between the rich and the poor in the economic, political, and social aspects of life, between workers and unjust employers, rich or poor, even between workers and just employers when disputing over conditions of employment. One of the weaknesses of Ratzinger's instruction is that he dismissed the reality too quickly and lightly in his eagerness to get at the Marxist doctrine behind the words "class struggle." He writes, "It cannot be taken as the equivalent of 'severe social conflict,' in an empirical sense." Ah, but it is, and more careful clarification should have been addressed to this confusion.

Marx and Gutierrez go further than the notion of class struggle as a historical reality — much further. I think Rat-

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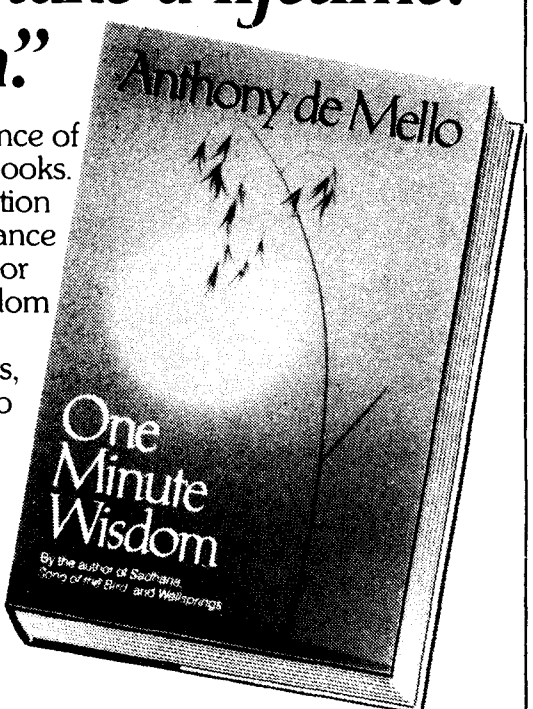

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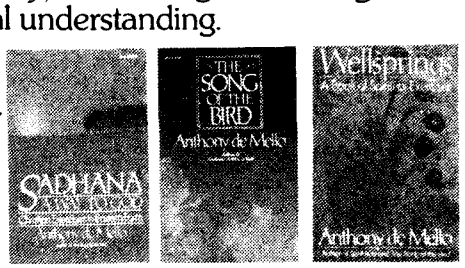

DOUBLEDAY

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zinger missed the boat when he summarized the Marxist notion as being the claim that if a person "belongs to the objective class of the rich, he is primarily a class enemy to be fought."

The Marxist doctrine, apparently shared by Gutierrez, is not that he is a class enemy if he belongs to the rich, but that he is a class enemy if he is an *employer,* because the employer-employee relationship is of necessity a bad, alienating, enslaving, exploitative relationship. By limiting Marxist class struggle to the rich versus the non-rich, Ratzinger conceded far too much to Marx and liberation theology. After all, Jesus had a very poor opinion of the rich. Remember the camel and the needle's eye.

No, Marx did not merely exclude the rich from his secular heaven. He excluded all employers, rich or poor (excepting only the state). And this exclusion is a far, far more difficult position to reconcile with Christianity than exclusion of the rich. Not simply because it flies in the face of all Judeo-Christian tradition, but even more because it flies in the face of common sense and everyday experience.

For common sense and everyday experience have taught us that employers and employees do have important things in conflict. But they also have important things in common. And they can and frequently do work out a just relationship that is abused by neither side, no more and no less than any other power relationship is abused in this permanently imperfect world where live and work permanently imperfect human beings.

Why do I say that Gutierrez apparently shares Marx's view of class struggle? I am thinking particularly, not just of the quotations cited above, but of pp. 272-279 of *A Theology of Liberation,* and of several reference notes on pp. 284 and 285, notably nn. 51, 56, and 57.

Perhaps the most significant passage is the following on page 277, where Gutierrez quotes with clear approval Louis Althusser, the hard-line French Communist:

> Understood in this way, the unity of the church is rightly considered by Althusser as a myth which must disappear if the church is to be "reconverted" to the service of the workers in the class struggle. "For this to happen," he asserts, "it would be necessary that the myth of the 'Christian community' disappear, for it prevents the recognition of the division of society into classes and the recognition of class struggle. One can foresee serious divisions occurring in the church precisely around the theme of the *recognition* and the *understanding* of social classes and the class struggle, the recognition and the understanding of a reality which is incompatible with the *peculiarly religious myth* of the 'community of the faithful' and the (catholic) universality of the church" [emphasis in the original].

What could be clearer? Insofar as Cardinal Ratzinger, however imperfectly, is saying that the *Marxist myth* of class struggle reflected in that passage and endorsed by Gutierrez is indeed incompatible with the *reality* of "the community of the faithful," I cannot possibly disagree with him. I must, on the contrary, disagree with Gutierrez. And the question, finally, comes down to this: how can any sensible Christian, reflecting carefully on these clearly contradictory positions, do otherwise?

One can understand why Gutierrez and most liberation theologians are cynical about "bourgeois democracy" as practiced in the United States, or, more to the point, practiced *on* our neighbors to the South.

Gutierrez, now and then, expresses his approval of "real" or "genuine" democracy, but he nowhere, to my knowledge, explains precisely what he means. The frequent putdowns for "reform" and "compromise" are not reassuring. Reform and compromise are of the essence of genuine democracy. In truth, they are of the essence of life. It is all very thrilling and *macho* to call for "revolution, revolution," but after the revolution, what?

IN THE "final document" of the founding convention of Christians for Socialism, a statement that Gutierrez helped to write, we find this remarkable paragraph:

> The revolutionary process is in full swing in Latin America. Many Christians have made a personal commitment to it, but many more Christians, imprisoned in mental inertia and categories that are suffused with bourgeois ideology, regard this process fearfully and insist on taking the impossible pathway of reformism and modernization. The Latin American process is all-embracing and one in character. [There seems to be no allowance permitted for differing situations in twenty-odd different countries — JCC.] We Christians do not have a peculiar political approach of our own to offer, and we do not wish to have such an approach. The realization that the process is all-embracing and one in character makes us comrades, uniting all those who are committed to the revolutionary struggle.

To which I would respond: "But, comrades, you do have a peculiar political approach of your own to offer. You have just expressed it: down with reform and up with revolution. You have an approach. What you do not have is some clear idea of where you are going, other than toward the same beautiful vision of freedom and justice that even the most pro-capitalist Christians profess. (Michael Novak recently published a book with the title, *Freedom with Justice.*) Once into politics, which is where you are obviously determined to be, the only responsible, the only intellectually competent course is to tell the voters exactly what you have in mind. Otherwise, you should stay out of politics."

The conclusion sounds harsh. The conclusion is harsh, something like the harshness of a jealous lover. I am jealous, envious of Karl Marx because he has won the affections of a lot of learned, eloquent, dedicated Christians whom I would like to see dedicated to a brand of socialism that is more unambiguously democratic.

Of these Father Gutierrez is certainly one of the most learned, eloquent, and dedicated of them all. His enemies are my enemies and his friends my friends. Or at least they were before they read this critique.

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THEFT & FLAIR

'EAGLES' & 'MONA LISA'

SUMMER FILMS resemble those time-release capsules in ads for cold remedies: some burst on the scene immediately around Memorial Day; some pop their bubbles in June; some don't fizz to the surface until July. Usually this correlates inversely with their quality: May movies are expected to be big money winners all summer long because, as a nephew of mine used to say, they are "*not* for mature audiences." Hence *Top Gun, Space Camp, The Manhattan Project, Short Circuit,* or Sylvester Stallone's latest contribution to social thought, *Cobra*. To avoid being swamped by the ads, publicity, and box office bonanzas of such "sure-fire hits," studios hold back more "adult" films to midsummer, and some really Quixotic distributors even dare a foreign entry. Hence both Universal's "comedy-thriller" *Legal Eagles* and the British import *Mona Lisa*.

Legal Eagles, featuring Robert Redford and Debra Winger, has been billed as director Ivan Reitman's first "mature" work. Reitman has worked himself up the Hollywood ladder in typical contemporary fashion, moving from early slaughter pictures like *Cannibal Girls* through "gross-outs" like *National Lampoon's Animal House,* to Saturday-Night-Live-type slapstick in *Meatballs, Stripes,* and *Ghostbusters*. The last two films were prime early June releases in 1981 and 1984. *Legal Eagles* is supposed to mark Reitman's emancipation — up from late-spring teen-film slavery to midsummer release for the old in mind.

The film, accordingly, involves an outwardly "adult" plot: Redford first prosecutes, then joins Winger in the defense of Darryl Hannah, who is accused of stealing a painting that she claims belongs to her. This allows for plenty of "mature" scenes as well: of many famous works of modern art; of some large and picturesque New York art galleries; of courtrooms with the latest in movie lady lawyers; and (with Redford having two damsels to choose from) of bedrooms, too.

But once past the star aura, ritzy production design, and publicity about the director's progress that surrounds the film, one must unfortunately endure its plot, which stinks. The "comic" rivalry-turned-friendship of Redford and Winger is supposed to evoke the sparring teamwork of duos like Hepburn and Tracy, but the best lines actually occur between Redford and his daughter. (With a plot striving to be so ultra contemporary, naturally he is divorced.) Most of the humor between the principals involves pratfalls, not wit. The best line in the film belongs to a cop making an arrest, who thereafter disappears. The best joke concerns Winger putting a dog on the witness stand — but we never get to see this. It's simply part of her reputed bag of defense attorney's tricks. The concept is worthy of Reitman's earlier films, and maybe shows where his true loyalties lie.

If Reitman's efforts at comedy fail, his attempt at a "thriller" also falters. With the eventual appearance of veteran British actor Terence Stamp as the head of the prestigious New York gallery at odds with our heroes, we get a classy, even if predictable, villain. Stamp is able to convey hauteur just by manipulating his ascending hairline. But his murder at mid-film fails to evoke keen suspense, only longing for some potent bad guy to take up the slack.

None appears until too late, after a complicated, often confusing set of plot twists. He turns out to be an art dealer with an axe to grind against all parties. There is no scene to explain in depth what fury drove him to revenge, although the actor playing the role (I will observe conventions and maintain the foolish secret) certainly has it in him to project that kind of anger. Indeed, he probably has more emotional power, and more love of fine art, than all the leads combined. But he doesn't look right — not sleek enough to inhabit the implied atmosphere of the art world as conceived by Reitman. Like the best comedy in the film, the best dramatic roles belong to supporting actors, and they are underdeveloped.

Of the leads, Winger is adequate and tries to animate the plot with some of her sweet/sassy pertness. Nevertheless, she's called on to get fond of Redford (just once, I'd love to see a screenplay defy the conventions!) and thereafter is tiresome. The blond bombshell himself is not so much bad as just not all there, cf. *Out of Africa*. Each of these periodic "returns" of Redford to the screen is billed as the second coming of Rhett Butler, but one wonders if his legend matches his performances. When was the last time Redford was genuinely absorbing in a role? Chances are your answer will involve a pairing with Paul Newman or Dustin Hoffman, who got him to play off their power and energy.

The worst acting in the film is by Darryl Hannah; she should have stayed in the ocean in *Splash*. Every film since has been a disaster. Watching her attempt deep feeling here in some "performance art" is painful. Her limited array of pouts is thinner than the Nordic profile that got her the role. Redford's daughter in the film (Jennie Dundas), makes the appropriate comment that she "looks guilty." She ought to.

Legal Eagles has received more than the usual share of advanced brouhaha, including a full article in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* the weekend before its release. Such an august periodical does, occasionally, dip into the arts; I recall pieces in the last few years on Horton Foote, Elie Wiesel, Georges Simenon, and Cynthia Ozick. But Ivan Reitman? His film says nothing about men and women, nothing about law, nothing about art or the passions that surround it. Somebody, perhaps, should be indicted for aiding and abetting box-office theft.

MONA LISA concerns not art but lowlife in modern London. The title is less from da Vinci than Nat King Cole's ironically romantic song, which fits the film's mood and plot.

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The story involves an uncouth petty hood with a heart of gold (Bob Hoskins) and an elegant prostitute (Cathy Tyson), whom he chauffeurs around to assignations. She then diverts him to search for one of her very young colleagues still walking the streets. Starkly directed by Neil Jordan, this film is only for the strong of stomach, not because of its violence but its raw vision of the seamy side of life. *Mona Lisa* abides by film noir conventions, yet with such conviction that it restores meaning to the term "underworld."

Beginning with Hoskins's release from prison, the film follows an established pattern, but with constant photographic and dramatic flair. The bright lights of the opening, when Hoskins is released from prison, give way to half-light when he starts driving Tyson around to search for her friend, then infernal "darkness visible" as they tour fire-lit slums on their desperate quest. Hoskins (who is separated from his wife and denied visits to the daughter he loves) is touched by the cruel exploitation in what he sees. To him, Tyson, at first only a "black tart," becomes "a lady" and then, with some poetic license, "a nun in disguise, a sister of mercy" for trying to save her friend.

Both sentimentality and exaggeration are avoided, however, by the film's harsh realism in portraying child prostitution. In addition, Hoskins's perfect portrayal (which won Best Acting award at Cannes this year) catches both the hood's bumbling incompetence and genuine chivalry. Like Bogart in *The Big Sleep* or *The Maltese Falcon*, Hoskins represents some small trace of decency in the urban forest of the night. He finds perfect foils in the regal Tyson and the magnificently brutal Michael Caine as the taciturn cockney crime lord who is first their employer, then nemesis. *Mona Lisa* is discomforting because it explores the existence of evil in frank terms.

TOM O'BRIEN

Stage

CLARKE'S 'LUSTHAUS'

LOVE & DEATH IN OLD VIENNA

THERE IS a small movie house in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, where the owner welcomes the customers as though they were stepping into her parlor, which is what the inner lobby looks like. I was reminded of this hospitable woman when I went to see Martha Clarke's new theater work, *Vienna: Lusthaus*, not because the Yeadon, which is a pleasure palace of sorts, much resembles Clarke's *Lusthaus*, but because Joseph Papp slipped a "Dear Patrons" note into the *Playbill* as though he felt a need to put us at our ease. Ostensibly an indication of his admiration for Martha Clarke, the Papp letter seems to have a subtext, asking us not to be shocked, disturbed, surprised, which is an odd message to get from the producer of *Aunt Dan and Lemon*. Presumably the theatergoers are there either because they read the enthusiastic and quite explicit reviews of *Vienna*, or else because, like Papp, they are old Clarke admirers who have followed her career from her years with the Pilobolus Dance Theater to *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1984-85), a creation which has played most recently at the International Theater Festival in Baltimore. Clarke is not appearing as a performer in *Vienna: Lusthaus*, but her mind, her eye, and her understanding of the capabilities of the human body are stamped all over the work which she conceived and directed.

Papp calls *Vienna: Lusthaus* a *tableau vivant*, a label that seems not quite right for a Clarke piece, not even for *The Garden of Earthly Delights* which is based on the Hieronymus Bosch painting. I think of the *tableau vivant* as a static stage picture, the performers posed and immobile like the Living Pictures that were so popular in England in the 1890s. The members of Clarke's company sometimes move with an almost painful slowness. They occasionally come full stop, frozen for an instant. But immobility is hardly a term that describes Clarke's work. Her pieces consist of images that form, dissolve, merge into one another and, although the viewer may carry away a portfolio of concrete pictures in his or her mind, the power of the work lies in its totality. This is particularly true of *Vienna: Lusthaus*.

The piece takes its name from the Pleasure Pavilion in the Prater. It is set in the Vienna of Schnitzler and Freud in which elegance, romance, and decadence mingle, where *Gemütlichkeit* rubs elbows with anti-Semitism; but it really takes place in the not-so-subconscious fantasies of most people. Unless an image calls for a ball gown or no clothes at all, the women wear those discreetly evocative turn-of-the-century undergarments — white pantaloons and singlets — that were so useful to Toulouse-Lautrec; the men are usually dressed as officers or wear formal late-Victorian mufti. The images are delicately suggestive or openly erotic, but the eroticism slides easily into the comic or the eccentric. There is no plot, but there is a recognizable thematic development as the work moves toward the final images which, visually and verbally, evoke death. The *Lusthaus* is a garden of earthly delights which needs no Bosch in the wings to remind the audience that all flesh is grass.

The matter of *Vienna: Lusthaus* gains its strength from method. It reflects Clarke's years with Pilobolus in its use of movements that emphasize the athleticism and control that is so important to the Pilobolus dances. At the opening, an officer, trim in uniform and black boots, stands center stage and then begins to move in a circle, becoming the horse and rider at once. After a brisk canter, he stops and, like a Lippizaner stallion, arches his leg, lets his foot hover tentatively, and then brings it gently to the ground. In a later scene, the same performer (no names are attached to specific sequences), nude now, moves slowly across the stage. The muscular control that made the horse sequence possible can be read in his bare body as in a Leonardo anatomy study. In another scene, a comic one that turns ugly as it moves from sex to violence, one of the men wears shoes on his hands and, as he contorts his

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body in unlikely ways, his arms and booted hands become another person with whom he is carnally involved. I was reminded of an exotic dance that used to be popular in sleazy night clubs, one in which the female dancer is both seducer and seducee as one hand tries to protect the woman from the hand that presses to undress her. Clarke may never have gone to such a night club, but, knowingly or not, she has annexed an old strip specialty number and turned it into a complex physical image that fits the theme and texture of her piece as a whole.

Much of what I have written above suggests that Clarke is the only begetter of *Vienna: Lusthaus*, but to be fair to her and the performers, the program here, as in *Earthly Delights*, indicates that the work was "Created with the Company." This sense of group endeavor reflects how much Clarke's work is enriched by the contribution of others. Richard Peaslee, who did the score for *Earthly Delights*, creates a gaily somber score for *Vienna: Lusthaus* with the aid, as the program says, of Bach, Friesen, and Johann Strauss. As in the earlier piece, the musicians wander in and out of the action, becoming part of the stage pattern. The set by Robert Israel is minimal, but it is designed to emphasize that space is an active participant in any dance. And Paul Gallo's lighting design not only helps establish the changing moods, but becomes an active part of the proceedings when it provides a shadow picture to accompany the live image on stage. For the first time, words have entered a Clarke piece. The text, by Charles Mee, Jr., consists of disconnected speeches — part anecdote, part confession — that sound as though they might have been lifted from case studies.

Vienna: Lusthaus is still another reminder, if one is needed, that American theater is no longer simply a matter of plays in performance. What makes Martha Clarke's piece so rewarding is not simply its technical ingenuity, but the way in which an aesthetic statement becomes a moral one. GERALD WEALES

G.K. CHESTERTON 50 YEARS LATER

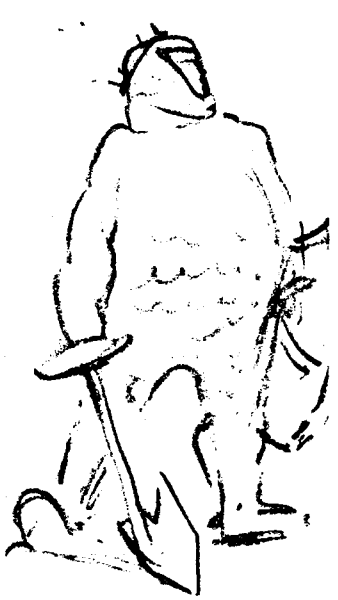
Master of topsy-turvydom

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

MY FATHER Patrick Braybrooke used to tell the story of how when he was a boy, G.K. Chesterton had one day visited their house and drawn for him and his brothers a series of quick sketches of knights, ladies with golden hair, and dragons. This had happened during the Boer War, and Cousin G. K., as he was called by the family, told them that these pictures were intended as an allegory of world events. What struck my father at the time, however, was the fact the Saint George was dressed as an English soldier.

Later, when my father began his career as a literary journalist, Chesterton was to help him get reviewing on various papers. Chesterton was proud of being a journalist, and mentions this several times in his *Autobiography*. Yet, although he was to write poems and essays in praise of Fleet Street, he never actually worked there. In the early days, when he lived in Kensington, Chesterton would write his pieces at home and then walk down with them to the *Daily News*. What he particularly liked about Fleet Street was its pubs, where the liveliness and quality of the talk made them so different from other London pubs. In 1901, in an article that he sent to the *Darlington North Star*, Chesteron described newspapers as "the largest work ever published anonymously since the great cathedrals." He was never to lose that romantic view of the press.

At eighteen, Chesterton had gone to the Slade School of Art and there acquired the habit of a lifetime of always carrying colored crayons in his pockets. To amuse his friends, he would often do lightning drawings. On the occasions when he came to see us, he appeared to have all the time in the world to spare. His watch had been stolen, he said, during a political demonstration in the 1890s, and he never bothered to replace it.



At Top Meadow, the house which G. K. and his wife Frances built at Beaconsfield in the 1920s, he used to enjoy showing children his toy theater, with its painted cardboard figures. At tea parties afterwards one of his tricks was to throw a bun in the air and catch it in his mouth. Then there was the mysterious character whom nobody ever met called Tommy. "I must get back to Tommy," G. K. would say. Only a few years ago did I discover that this referred to his book on Thomas Aquinas, which came out in 1933.

When G.K. was at home, he worked every day. He would start at 10:30 in the morning and carry on until 6:00 P.M. or so. After dinner he would relax with a cigar and a glass of wine. Spirits he abominated. Sometimes he would read a

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE, *British writer, editor, and critic, is presently at work on an autobiography.*

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detective story, or look through the review books on his table. Now and again on the back of an envelope he would make notes for the next day's work.

He had the ability to gut a book very fast and to dictate chapters of his own books at tremendous speed. "The Ballad of the White Horse," which runs to nearly a hundred pages in his *Collected Poems*, he completed in less than a fortnight. There are few alterations in the manuscript.

Before me, I have a poem entitled "Idolatry," which he wrote when he was a schoolboy at Saint Paul's. It opens with this question:

> Shall we say of the wild-eyed savage
> who crouches with gibber and moan,
> Where the dead stone god sits glaring, that the worship is dead as the stone?

The answer that follows is an emphatic No. The poem ends with this comment on the wild-eyed savage:

> He prays to the presence within him that has prompted the heart to pray.

It is a line which sums up Chesterton's entire approach to religion. There is, of course, also the paradox of a poem called "Idolatry" which turns out to be about worship. But then, G.K. delighted in turning things upside down. Once when he sat on a chair and broke it at my grandparents' house, he apologized to my grandmother: "At least you cannot say I fell on my face." In his book *The Poet and the Lunatics*, he wrote: "You remember Saint Peter was crucified upside down . . . He saw the landscape as it really is, with stars like flowers, and the clouds like hills, and all men hanging on the mercy of God."

Chesterton saw the sacred and the profane not running in parallel lines, but as rising and converging. With this notion went another, that of the topsy-turvy. Here are two examples, one from his life, one from his books:

When I was young we lived in Russell Square. We were hard up, and the Chestertons gave us furniture, including some heavy damask curtains. But as we had no carpets and it was a top-floor flat, my mother decided to use the curtains as carpets. G.K. congratulated her on this topsy-turvy arrangement. In one of his Father Brown stories there is a scene where the priest and the murderer meet on the top of a Gothic tower. As they look down, they share the same vision of the grey walls beneath them and the landscape around them: "a topsy-turvydom of stone in mid-air" and "a glimpse of great things small and small things great."

There were times, though, when the paradoxes limped. Chesterton's book on Shaw has a particularly feeble beginning: "Most people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him and I do not agree with him."

Yet Chesterton at his best, like Shaw, had the ability to look at things in a new light. In his last broadcast for the BBC, he singled out the phrase "as dull as ditchwater." Naturalists had informed him that ditchwater was anything but dull. Look through a microscope, he told his listeners, and you will find in it creatures far more amusing than those found in an ornamental pond, some even caricaturing the profiles of statesmen and politicians.

Fifty years ago last month, Chesterton died of heart failure at Beaconsfield. He was sixty-two. In Europe, in 1936, the storm clouds were gathering and unrest was growing everywhere. To his devoted secretary, Dorothy Collins, G.K. said that the issue for the future was clear: "It is between light and darkness—and everyone must choose his side." A month after his death the Spanish Civil War broke out.

Books: IMPORTANCE OF BEING FOCUSED

SYNOD EXTRAORDINARY
THE INSIDE STORY
OF THE ROME SYNOD

Peter Hebblethwaite
Doubleday, $15.95, 146 pp.

Joseph A. Komonchak

FROM the moment that Pope John Paul II convoked an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, the synod became the focus of the debate that now divides Catholics. The division concerns the interpretation and evaluation of the council that occasioned the broadest and deepest changes in the Catholic church in centuries. Anticipations of the synod faithfully echoed the hopes and fears which preceded the council itself and gave its first session the quality of high drama. And, of course, the debate about the council heated up considerably with the full publication of Cardinal Ratzinger's "report" on the post-conciliar church.

No interpretation of the synod would be worth reading that did not place it against this context, a fault that certainly cannot be found in Peter Hebblethwaite's little book. He had the good idea to go back to the *Acta* of the council to see what part Karol Wojtyla had played in it and to give a very brief analysis of the book with which the future pope had interpreted the council to the church in Cracow. Hebblethwaite also uses the debate about the impact of the council as the backdrop for his review of other events in the life of the church last year, especially the pope's visits to Holland, Belgium, and Africa.

But it is the figure of Cardinal Ratzinger which dominates the book. Hebblethwaite argues correctly that, whether it was intended by the pope and cardinal or not, the cardinal's negative and timorous evaluation of the post-conciliar period did appear to be setting

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an agenda for the synod; and it is difficult to write anything about the meeting that does not compare it with the cardinal's views. Unfortunately, however, Hebblethwaite's book suffers from this focus for two reasons. First, it is not greatly superior to *The Ratzinger Report* (Ignatius Press, 1985) in the critical quality of its framework and categories. The issues are too often presented as a struggle between the good guys and the bad guys, without much nuance and with inadequate attention to the historical, sociological, and theological complexities. This is too bad, because Hebblethwaite, one of the few journalists who is also theologically literate, might have made a real contribution here.

Secondly, Hebblethwaite, like Cardinal Ratzinger, focuses far too much on North Atlantic concerns. His principal heroes are Cardinals Danneels and Hume and Bishop James Malone, whose views are outlined at some length and always sympathetically. Other figures, representing other concerns of other churches, are only introduced in passing. Although Hebblethwaite claims to have received a number of the pre-synodal responses of the churches, he describes only those from England and Wales, the United States, and Belgium. Cardinal Danneels's Initial Report, which summarized those responses, is discussed, but no attempt is made to evaluate it by comparison with the reports themselves. When Hebblethwaite turns to the many speeches delivered in the first week of the synod, which he is correct in describing as "a magnificant panorama of Catholicity," he contents himself with a single paragraph of "continental generalizations," before returning to North American and European concerns.

For most Catholics, the final report, issued by the bishops and made public, is likely to be the only document of the synod they will ever read. For that reason, it is regrettable that Hebblethwaite devotes less than five pages to its genesis and contents. Twice he says that Cardinal Danneels's two earlier reports to the synod were drafts of the final report, but he provides little textual analysis to back up the claim. More serious is another charge that he makes about the final report: "Had this text been prepared in advance? Was this the answer the synod had been programmed to give from the outset? I believe that it was, and that thus Pope John Paul would be able to endorse it with enthusiasm and rejoice that the synod had so accurately summed up his own views." This is a rather grave charge and needs greater substantiation than the little provided here. Cardinal Danneels stated "that he arrived at the synod not knowing what was going to happen"; and Hebblethwaite says he believes him because the cardinal is "an honorable man." But this faint praise is apparently not enough to convince Hebblethwaite, even after the cardinal, confronted with his charge, continues to claim responsibility for the report.

As for the contents of the final report, they are rather more subtle and diverse than Hebblethwaite makes them appear when he says that it "reflected, point by point, what the German language-group had said; the other eight [language groups] were used only to the extent that they confirmed the German-language positions." There is no doubt that the German group's views, closely paralleling those of Cardinal Ratzinger, influenced the report, at times even verbally, but the final report is clearly a compromise document, whose literary and theological unevenness reveals that it was written so that no principal position advanced at the synod would either be rejected or allowed alone to prevail. Even the theological positions particularly favored by the Germans are stated so generally that by themselves they can hardly be quarreled with. As soon as questions get particular, especially with regard to structural issues, nuances are introduced that at least postpone any definitive resolution in the direction desired by Cardinal Ratzinger.

In the end, the problem with this book is the haste with which it was published. Most of it appears to have been written before the synod opened, and the demands of deadlines may have prevented Hebblethwaite from waiting until documents were available which could have permitted him both to verify some of his hypotheses and to engage in more serious theological and redactional analyses. (Indeed, since this book was completed, Hebblethwaite has published in *The Tablet* analyses of the final report deeper than any that appear in this book.) A good history and theological analysis of the synod of 1985 remains to be written.

Possessive ghosts of nostalgia

THE IOWA BASEBALL CONFEDERACY

W.P. Kinsella
Houghton Mifflin,
$16.95, 310 pp.

DANCE ME OUTSIDE

MORE TALES FROM THE ERMINESKIN RESERVE

W.P. Kinsella
David R. Godine,
$14.95, 158 pp.

Steven G. Kellman

BASEBALL is the most graphogenic of sports, and writers are forever enumerating and celebrating the reasons. Among the writers have been Ring Lardner, Bernard Malamud, Mark Harris, Jay Neugeboren, and Robert Coover. And among the reasons has been its built-in nostalgia for nineteenth-century American individualism. What was in times past the national pastime is a repository of collective pastoral myths. Unlike most other team sports, baseball is not governed by the clock; a game could in principle stretch on for eternity. And, in contrast to arenas for basketball, football, hockey, and soccer, the baseball field has no fixed limits; the outfield could in principle stretch to infinity. "Baseball is the one single thing the white man has done right," says Drifting Away, a phantom Indian in W.P. Kinsella's new novel, a winsome fantasy in which one game lasts 2,614 innings and a fielder fades into the horizon while chasing a fly.

Kinsella's second novel is also his second baseball book. His first, *Shoeless Joe* (1982), was a metafictional whimsy

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about an Iowa farmer named Kinsella who constructs a diamond on his property. He conjures up the late Shoeless Joe Jackson, whose career was blighted by the 1919 World Series scandal, to play on a timeless team. He also recruits J.D. Salinger to join his visionary company in a game that is undiscernible to the unimaginative.

The Iowa Baseball Confederacy recycles many of the same elements. Like the finest baseball fictions — *The Natural, Bang the Drum Slowly, The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* — it is not exclusively, or even primarily, for the sports fan. The summer game becomes the context and metaphor for imagination, commitment, and personal achievement. This genial novel, in which Leonardo da Vinci materializes in a balloon gondola behind second base to announce he invented baseball in 1506, is itself a sport. Like baseball, the book inspires to infinity and eternity, in the hope that its fondest readers might share its narrator's wish: "*I want the game to go on forever.*"

He is Gideon Clarke, and he finds himself endowed with preternatural encyclopedic knowledge of an institution that has vanished from public memory: a baseball league that fielded a team seventy years ago in his hometown of Onamata, Iowa. Gid's father, who was killed by a lone drive hit into the stands of Milwaukee County Stadium, was the only other person aware of the Iowa Baseball Confederacy. He even wrote a dissertation on it for the University of Iowa, but he was told by the history department to submit it to the English, as the book was brilliant fiction. Although Gid cannot find a trace of documentation to support his detailed claims about the Confederacy, he persists in his obsession, losing his wife and gaining the reputation of town eccentric.

It is the novel's amiable premise that there are cracks in time. And, one summer evening, accompanied by Stan Rogalski, a friend whose quest for a baseball career is as tenacious as Gid's is to authenticate the Confederacy, Gid walks into July 3, 1908. It is the eve of an exhibition game between the Chicago Cubs and an all-star squad from the Iowa Baseball Confederacy.

At the end of nine innings, the score is tied at three runs each, but the players refuse to quit, continuing like maniacs in their inconclusive match. As if injected with pituitrin, the novel increasingly assumes the qualities of tall tale, as, despite rain and flood, the teams play on and on, day after day, in a game that would surely have earned a permanent niche in the record books were it not erased from collective consciousness immediately after its apocalyptic finale. Gid alone remembers. He also refuses to forget Sarah, the woman he loves and loses as 1908 floats away. *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* is not above the facile humor of anachronism or the stock time-travel irony of an ingenue's assertion: "You can't live in the past." But when imagination challenges mutability, no one ought to leave the ballpark early.

The ghost of Drifting Away, an Indian dispossessed by the white man's expansion, mysteriously controls the fate of the Iowa Baseball Confederacy, whose name suggests a lost cause akin to that of tribal culture and, ultimately, of all we cherish. The least convincing element in Kinsella's novel, the Indian theme, is central to *Dance Me Outside*, a 1977 short-story collection now reissued. Set in the Ermineskin Indian Reserve in the author's native Alberta, *Dance Me Outside* refracts white Canadian values through the prism of Cree consciousness. Though the result is light, it also refines the way we see.

All seventeen stories are narrated by Silas Ermineskin, an eighteen-year-old Cree who is studying mechanics in a nearby government school. He writes them, in a distinctive vernacular voice, for his English teacher. "It is Mr. Nichols who get me to write down stories and he say if I keep on maybe someday I write some good enough to get printed." Not only are they good enough to get printed, but they are wily enough to levitate their trickster teller above the harsh world of poverty, alcoholism, suicide, prostitution, and murder he inhabits.

For all the material bleakness of the reservation, Silas rejects Wetaskiwin, Edmonton, Calgary, and even Las Vegas. His sly adventures in those cities bring him and the reader back to the more authentic life the reservation represents. Urban civilization is seen as bureaucratic, callous, and inert, an unsatisfactory alternative to the compassionate family the vibrant Crees provide. "With us here, it don't matter what you done, it always okay for you to come back home," says Silas.

A menace to that home are the bigoted Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the book's most visible token of white oppression and self-deception. The principle governing most of the book's stories is inversion of power: how simple Silas and his friends outwit arrogant outsiders. To conform to others' stereotypes, Silas knows how to dress up as a painted brave, but it is pretense with which he is valiantly at war. Assimilationist Indians evoke his pity and sneers. Chief Tom Crow-eye, whose political ambitions lead him to repudiate his background, and Hobart Thunder, the American Indian Movement organizer who tries to exploit Indian culture to advance his career, could have found a more flattering publicist than the sagely innocent Silas. His stories are not so sentimental that they invariably paint white as black and red as white; Silas himself feels the lure of the city, living for a while in Calgary with a prostitute named Linda and helping Poppy Twelvetrees run off to Edmondton. But honesty and benevolence are qualities this reservation Indian never abandons, because they are embodied in his comic vantage point.

Silas's sensitivity is evident to Mad Etta, a 400-pound medicine "man" who adopts him as her assistant. Etta combines the functions of community midwife, healer, and advisor. She counsels her young disciple: "Silas, you got to learn to look inside people. You got to

REVIEWERS

FATHER JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK, *who was in Rome during the synod, teaches theology at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.*

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WILLIAM R. AYERS, M.D., *is associate dean for undergraduate medical education at Georgetown's School of Medicine.*

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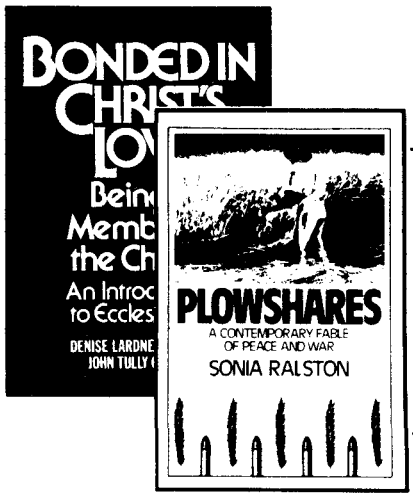

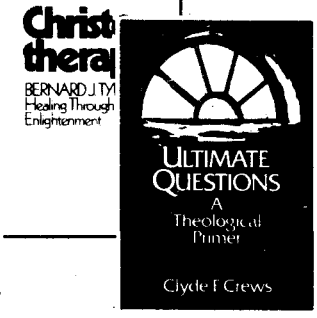

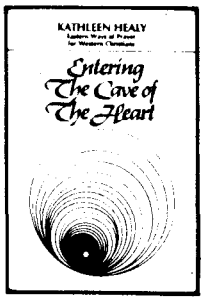

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size them up like they was a stack of beer glasses. You listen and you look real close until you see which one got the fly on it. Then you figure out how to get the fly out without knocking down the whole stack." Etta might have made a superb coach in the Iowa Baseball Confederacy, or in the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Fording uncharted boundary waters

MODERN SCIENCE AND HUMAN VALUES

William W. Lowrance
Oxford, $24.95, 209 pp.

William R. Ayers

CAN anything good come of the Chernobyl disaster? Maybe. Sometimes in the backwash of tragedy an opportunity to sharpen our appreciation of human values surfaces. The attention may be fleeting but for those who wish to explore the interface between science and science-watchers, I recommend *Modern Science and Human Values* by William W. Lowrance. A 1985 publication by the Director of the Life Sciences and Public Policy Program at the Rockefeller University, it fortuitously includes an invigorating discussion of the Rasmussen Report, a $4 million Reactor Safety Study conducted in the mid-1970s for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Termed by Lowrance an "archetypal analytic exercise," The Rasmussen Report contained literally pounds of value-laden or "meta-analytical" considerations that exemplify the boundary between technology and technology-run-rampant.

That boundary, usually called an "interface," is the focus of discourse on the subject of the relation between science and value. The choice of the word "interface" is emblematic of the semantic thickets one will get into here. To crystallographers an interface is a nearly impenetrable boundary. It is certainly not the medium for free bidirectional exchange — as was once the case when physics constituted a branch of Aristotelian philosophy.

Semantics aside, Lowrance has his sequences straight. He calls technical progress a "directed tragedy." His treatment of the "medicalization" of life, discussion of the scientific method versus subjectivity, and the idea of professionalism and responsibility are not only topical but understandable. He avoids a common pitfall. Most other commentators on the intersection of science and values make a methodological error. Depending on which side is initially invoked, scientists typically set up philosophy as a straw man; for their part, philosophers construct a science that does not really exist. Lowrance makes neither mistake. Using illustrative case studies, he has written a book about what happens to people when they are overwhelmed by events and numbers. We are told the ways in which we adapt or fail to adapt to the present. It is an exposition about what to do for the future. Not unlike Toffler's *Future Shock*, it is about the death of permanence.

If one accepts Lowrance's notions of permanence and transience, it is logical to expect him to discuss renegotiation of the relationships between science and human values as time advances. Indeed he does precisely this, using another example from the 1970s, the controversy over recombinant DNA research. A series of remarkably interrelated investigations in the sixties had demonstrated that genes are long strands of aminoacids within chromosomes, and that the genes dictated cellular activity by encoding specific sequences of aminoacids into proteins according to a reproducible blueprint for biological activity. The ability to manipulate these sequences we now call genetic engineering. The 1970 controversy arose because a scientific dream materialized before the dreamers were ready for it.

The ensuing clamor led to compromise — and relative calm. As Lowrance points out, no new laws were passed or strict regulations imposed. In return, scientists promised self-control within guidelines set by the National Institutes of Health and accepted the understanding that breaches of the agreement, even accidental ones, would likely trigger more stringent sanctions. Such mutual understanding, whether called contract or compact, stewardship or covenant, is the essential element upon which science and technology must co-exist with the values of the humanities.

You may wish to quarrel with Lowrance's characterization of the interface between science and the humanities as stewardship, or prefer as I do, the notion of a covenant. But our Three Mile Island event did not become a Chernobyl disaster. It is likely the value-laden, meta-analytical portions of the Rasmussen Report played a preventive role.

A book with thirty-three pages of bibliographic references is hardly for the summer escapist. But the troubled thinker can use *Modern Sciences and Human Values* as a very readable guide. To understand the debate, read the book.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 386)

in [his] article.

Mr. Sheehan implies that Sandinista harassment of the Catholic hierarchy is a function of the *comandantes'* Marxist-Leninist ideology and their subsequent repressive tendencies. Such a snapshot analysis ignores the fact that the Sandinistas are a revolutionary movement which quite recently deposed a dictatorship which long enjoyed both tacit and overt support from the church leadership.

It was in order to reverse the church's image as an apologist for repression that the Latin American bishops met at Medellín and Puebla and identified themselves with the interests of the poor. Mr. Sheehan seems to want to turn this historic "option for the poor" into a program which provides "the consolation of the sacraments, the rosary, the chanted litany to the Virgin that helps them [the poor] to endure their misery." Though this respect for the devotion of the Nicaraguan poor is, on its own, laudable, when it is presented as the proper (one is tempted to say exclusive) mission of the

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church in Central America, two questions come to mind. First, could this be what the bishops had in mind at Medellín and Puebla when they pledged the church's solidarity with the poor and oppressed? And second, what was it Marx said about the opiate of the people?

TIMOTHY A. BYRNES

Points of indignation

Philadelphia, Pa.

To the Editors: I deplore *Commonweal*'s publication of Edward Sheehan's article "The Battle for Nicaragua" [May 9]. As you predicted, the article caused disappointment (in *Commonweal*'s judgment) and indignation (at the author's presumption, at the quick way in which confusion spreads).

Sheehan is hard to refute because he hardly makes any points at all. He chose to abandon his scholarly resources in favor of a journalistic job in which the juxtaposition of a few statements composes "the truth," as if his self-definition as a "Christian humanist from the center" freed him from responsibility to take sides. The superficial approach serves well the cause of ideology and gives us a picture without depth, yet not without pitfalls for the uncritical reader.

To state the following points seems important until *Commonweal* publishes some better material on the subject, as I trust and plead that it will:

● Not only the Sandinista church is political; not only Father Molina is used by the media in support of a certain position. In post-revolutionary Nicaragua every act is political and every institution has taken sides. The anti-Sandinista stand of some members of the church plays into the hands of internal and powerful external counter-revolutionary forces.

● Just as Nicaragua is an embattled country having to defend the costly gains of its revolution against unequal forces at the cost of reconstruction, so is the popular church losing precious energy fighting for the right to exist. We want a revolutionary church that can still exercise its prophetic, critical function vis-à-vis the government of Nicaragua. Therefore, we must hope that the church will soon be free of the burden of having to justify itself at all times.

● Sheehan presents a picture of an absolutely polarized church in Nicaragua. Yet we know that there is a large segment of the population which is neither organized in *comunidades de base* nor a part of the anti-Sandinista church, that supports the revolution and still worships in a traditional way, and has a heightened awareness of the social content of the Gospel. The present confrontation, with well calculated strategy, is trying to force these people to choose

In her article "Contemplation & Controversy" [June 20], Eva Fleischner wished to express her gratitude to Germaine Ribiere, who first brought news of the Carmel of Auschwitz to the church of France. We regret it was not included in the article.

THE EDITORS

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between church and Sandinismo, a suicidal choice and one that denies the early popular position that made this revolution so unique: *"Entre cristianismo y revolución no hay contradicción."*

● Nothing is said in the article about important historical facts and documents: the official statement on religion by the National Directory of the FSLN (1980); the Episcopal Conference's statement on military conscription (1983); the fact that some bishops did not sign the document; the response to the Conference's statement from Christian groups all over the country; the proliferation of counter-revolutionary religious sects in Nicaragua in the first years of the revolution, most of them of Protestant and foreign origin, and their campaigns; the public expressions of solidarity with the popular church from the U.S. Episcopal Conference and the VI Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Sheehan's interviews and conclusions are set in a vacuum of historical understanding.

"The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary," said Gabriel García Márquez in 1982, speaking on behalf of many of us Latin Americans. The importance of the subject that "The Battle for Nicaragua" addresses deserves great care. The consequences of the confusion and ignorance about Central America in the United States are measured today in the suffering of the Nicaraguan people.

AURORA CAMACHO DE SCHMIDT

Ignoring reality

Sacramento, Calif.

To the Editors: If the article about the church in Nicaragua was intended to influence people to rally behind the *contras* and/or the church at Rome, this reader is not impressed.

Cardinal Obando is heir to a very long Latin American tradition that has done little to upset the *status quo* that built fine churches but, in most cases, did little to protest the oppression of the poor. Then, we wonder why the situation in Nicaragua was ripe for Marxist inroads. Both the church and the United States, through their histories, can take a good share of the credit, or blame, for the way things are.

God is not putting his blessing on any side that resorts to violence, *contras* or Sandinistas. Nor does the intransigence of Cardinal Obando serve any good purpose. Does he put his energies into using his influence to promote the social justice that the Scriptures advocate and that papal encyclicals have urged? Preaching the Gospel is more than words from the pulpit.

Of course, there are differences between Poland and Nicaragua. What does defy logic, and common sense, is to have John Paul II ignore reality: he often speaks about devotion to the poor and social justice but [urges priests] to avoid politics in carrying out this devotion. He never has in Poland, nor has the church in the past. God uses Marxism for his own purposes, as he did the Assyrians and the Babylonians, because after two thousand years the Good News has been given a lot of lip service and very little practice in comparison to the need. The world was made for everyone to have enough, and it is the responsibility of Christians to see to it by carrying the message in their lives.

The divisions, the lack of fraternal love, in the church in Nicaragua and elsewhere, need reconciliation. How dare we say the Our Father otherwise, from the top down? Did Jesus tell the story of the Prodigal Son just for an audience in first-century Palestine? The Father loves both sons, liberation theologians and the church which has been in need of reform almost since the beginning. Mr. Sheehan is not a competent judge of the location of God's presence. According to Scripture, God is present wherever people gather to worship him with love and sincerity.

MRS. PATRICIA M. LEIPER

Correction: In "A Genius for Passion & Purity," by William Dunlea [May 23], we mistakenly attributed these dying words — "We do not know what we desire." — to Mauriac himself rather than to the miserly Louis, hero of *Viper's Knot*.

THE EDITORS

Where is judgment?

Shelburne, Vt.

To the Editors: I am astonished at your lack of judgment in printing the Sheehan article ["The Battle for Nicaragua," May 9]. How can he speak of "messy facts" and miss the messiest fact in the puzzle: the savage war by the U.S. against Nicaragua, with troops poised to strike (and your injudicious publication of Sheehan will soften resistance to *that*); then the utter disgrace to the U.S. for hiring into violent prostitution the pathetic adolescent *contras* (whom Sheehan says "bear a legitimate grievance." . . . Great ammunition for Reagan.) Obando's refusing to condemn the *contras* defines him, in many eyes, as a traitor, however blindly well-intentioned. Finally, it is crude of your editorial to call "trivial" the witness of the three priests in the government: a world-renowned poet, a university vice-president, a founder of a world-changing publishing house. They are gifted visionaries and prophets. There was a time when we could say that about the editors of *Commonweal*.

WILLIAM CLEARY

Refreshing to read

Worth, Ill.

To the Editors: Edward R.F. Sheehan's article ["The Battle for Nicaragua," May 9] was refreshing. I, too, am not convinced "that John Paul II misunderstands Latin America." In September 1949 a delegation of Polish "priest-patriots" pledged their loyalty and cooperation to their new Communist government, which welcomed them as part of a plan to make the church loyal and subservient to the state. These priests were given financial support, faculty positions, permission to publish a newspaper, and various state decorations. Many of them later changed their posture toward the government. Yet even as late as 1961, Stephan Cardinal Wyszynski, John Paul II's mentor, issued a pastoral letter on this problem. In their daily un-

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wavering dedication to the people most Latin American priests show more courage than I ever will. Sheehan helped to enlarge the picture.

WILLIAM DROEL

Just what I saw

Baltimore, Md.

To the Editors: It is with great interest that I read the article, "The Battle for Nicaragua" by Edward R. F. Sheehan [May 9].

I returned in March from fourteen months of pastoral work with the poor in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. Since then I have been reading many different newspaper and magazine articles on the situation in that country. Very few reported the reality of what I had seen, heard, or observed in my day-to-day experiences. The article by Edward Sheehan (and information in *America* magazine (Jan. 18, 1986) are the exceptions. Specifically, while in the country I picked up from a daily reading of the two pro-government newspapers, *El Nuevo Diario* and *La Barricada* a continual undermining of the Catholic church. I saw for myself that all the bookstores in Matagalpa are filled with books and magazines on Marx, Lenin, Engels, Soviet Military Review, etc. I wouldn't see any difficulty with this if other materials were also available. However, it is rare to find literature or books other than those mentioned above. I was told by those who teach in the Catholic schools that the new education is completely materialistic. Students say that if they do not support the tasks of the revolution they are penalized. Regarding political prisoners, native Nicaraguans say there are many underground prisons throughout the country, especially along the Atlantic coast.

SR. ROSALIA VADALA, OSF

Two tragedies

Bronx, N.Y.

To the Editors: Edward Sheehan is correct ["The Battle for Nicaragua," May 9]. The real tragedy of Nicaragua is the terrible division in the church. In a revolution in which the church was so positively involved, it is a tragedy that the situation has deteriorated into a bitter [struggle] between devoted Catholics who see the situation in such conflicting terms. We pray for some process of reconciliation that might bring both groups of devoted Catholics together.

The other tragedy is the fact that so many of the *campesinos,* who have been caught up with the *contras,* think they are fighting for the freedom of the church when in actuality, they're being conned into an unjust intervention for the support of American political interests.

JOSEPH P. FITZPATRICK, S.J.
Professor Emeritus of Sociology

The author replies:

The editors have asked me to be brief, so let me focus on common themes in the critical letters.

One of the most dismaying elements of the current debate on Nicaragua is the frequent assumption that if one criticizes the Sandinistas, one is perforce in favor of the Reagan administration's policy. As I stated clearly early in my article, I strongly oppose Reagan's plea to continue arming the *contras* and his military policies in Central America generally. As I also tried to make clear, irrespective of U.S. policy, the Sandinistas must be judged on their own merits.

Any objective visitor to Nicaragua can witness how much harm the Sandinistas' cruel and incompetent regime has done to the country and the Nicaraguan people. To say this, to tell the truth as one sees it, is not meant to comfort the Reagan administration. I believe that both sides are wrong, and that it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. Moreover, to blame all of Nicaragua's woes on U.S. pressure (as the "popular church" is so fond of doing) is to overlook the very nature of the Sandinistas' repressive Marxist policies.

I also made clear my misgivings about the sometimes devious methods of Cardinal Obando. However, in fairness to him it must be remembered that he strongly resisted the Somoza dictatorship. In talking to me, he said that Nicaragua is "a ping-pong ball between the superpowers," a statement that echoes the declarations of the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference — that the bishops oppose any outside interference by the U.S. or USSR — a position the cardinal has endorsed.

As for the Nicaraguan people's devotion to the traditional faith, I stated it as a fact I observed all over Nicaragua. It is fatuous to assume from this that somehow devotion to the traditional faith contradicts the church's stated concern for the misery of the poor. It seems to me that much rethinking needs to be done among liberal American Catholics about the Sandinista regime, the church's role in confronting it, and the possibility that, as head of the church, Pope John Paul II may — occasionally at least — be right.

EDWARD R.F. SHEEHAN

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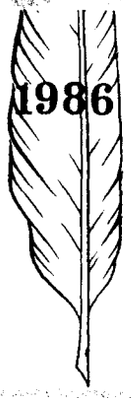

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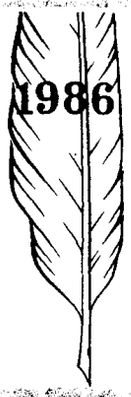

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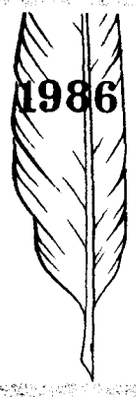

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